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THE LANDSCAPE ILLUSTRATIONS

TO AN EDITION

OF

THE WORKS

OF

ROBERT BURNS,

FROM THE ORIGINAL DRAWINGS TAKEN BY

D. O. HILL,

INTENDED FOR

ALLAN CUNNINGHAM'S EDITION

OF

THIS GREAT NATIONAL POET'S WORKS.

It is intended, by publishing these Illustrations in a separate form, to give every admirer of Burns an opportunity of possessing, at a reasonable rate, fac similes of the scenes rendered classic by his pen, in sizes suitable alike for the *Port feuille*, the Album, or to bind up with every published edition of his Works.—For these purposes, sets will be published in folio, in quarto, and medium octavo, with letter press descriptions of the localities, from the pen of Mr Cunningham, together with the song or poem which each landscape illustrates.

CONTENTS OF PART I.

FRONTISPIECE:

PART II.

PART III.

THE

WORKS

OF

ROBERT BURNS;

WITH

HIS LIFE,

BY

ALLAN CUNNINGHAM.

"Hail, Child of Scottish Song!
That could'st alternately impart
Wisdom and rapture in thy page,
And brand each vice with satire strong,
Whose lines are mottoes of the heart,
Whose truths electrify the sage."

CAMPBELL.

IN EIGHT VOLUMES

VOL. VII.

LONDON
JAMES COCHRANE AND CO.
11, WATERLOO PLACE.

1834.

WILLIAM NICOL, 51, PALL-MALL, LONDON.

NOTICE.

With this volume closes the correspondence of Burns. A number of letters are now printed for the first time; others not in Currie's edition have been admitted: and several, before imperfect, are given entire, without alteration, or omission. That Burns wrote many of his letters in extreme haste this work sufficiently shows: that he wrote others in wild fits of fun and humour might likewise be proved, did public taste permit the disclosure of what was meant to be private: yet, in the hastiest of these published effusions, there are marks of his truly original mind, even the slightest of them will be found to record some sentiment, or fix some important date, which those who desire to trace the history of the Poet would not willingly lose.

In the progress of this work it has been more than once intimated that Burns addressed before

his marriage a number of Letters to a lady in Edinburgh, whose name we choose with the Poet and herself to conceal in that of Clarinda. They are in general hasty effusions, with passages of great brilliancy and force: if the remark of Wilson be accurate, that the Poet was drunk when he composed some of his letters, few would feel disinclined to claim for three or four of these effusions the protection of insobriety, there is an audacity and dash about them which alarm the timid and the sensitive. Nay Syme, as he collected for Currie the correspondence of the Bard, was afraid lest Clarinda might be tempted to burn them, and wrote to her accordingly. Her reply can never be quoted, but to her praise.

"What can have impressed," said Clarinda, "such an idea upon you as that I ever conceived the most distant intention to destroy these precious memorials of an acquaintance, the recollection of which would influence me were I to live till fourscore. Be assured I never will suffer one of them to perish: this I give you my solemn word of honour upon: nay more, on condition that you send me my letters, I will select such passages from our dear bard's letters as will do honour to his memory, and cannot hurt my own fame even with the most rigid. His letters however are really not literary: they are the passionate effusions of an elegant mind: indeed too tender to be exposed to the eye of any but a partial friend. Were the world

composed of minds such as yours, it would be cruel even to bury them: but ah! how very few would understand, much less relish such compositions. The bulk of mankind are strangers to the delicate refinements of superior minds."

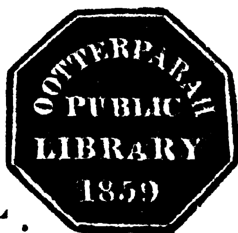
The promised extracts were probably made, for Clarinda seems to have offered them in full sincerity of soul: they were not however employed by Currie, in the life of the Poet; nor do we hear more of the letters till the year 1802, when they unexpectedly made their appearance from the press of Stewart, of Glasgow. It seems that Finlay, a poet and antiquarian, had obtained them from Clarinda, with permission only to make extracts for his life of Burns: forgetting, however, his promise, he printed the whole—twenty-five in number—with an announcement that the "originals" might be seen by all who were either suspicious or curious. This alarmed Clarinda, and exasperated the proprietors of the posthumous works of the Poet: an injunction was moved for and obtained, the publication was stopt, and up to the present hour the law forbids the introduction of Clarinda's letters among the other works of Burns. The consequence is that they are printed and sold without let, or hindrance, by a certain portion of the trade, while Booksellers of character are prevented from giving them to the world in a shape worthy of their merits.

During the progress of this work the editor deemed it his duty to the memory of the Poet, and

to the kindness of five thousand purchasers, to solicit permission from Clarinda to unite "The Letters" to the rest of the works of Burns. This request he regrets to say was not complied with: she continues to think that the time is not yet come, when they can be published with propriety: he bows to her decision and respects her motives. He is however of opinion, that as they are already pretty widely known it would be judicious to permit the reprint: it is in vain to wait for the time when "passionate effusions," offered at the shrine of wit and beauty, will be regarded as sermons.

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The letters marked thus * are now published for the first time in the Correspondence of Burns.



GENERAL

CORRESPONDENCE.

No. CXXIX.

TO JOHN RICHMOND,

EDINBURGH.

Mossgiel, 9th July, 1786.

My dear Friend,

With the sincerest grief I read your letter. You are truly a son of misfortune. I shall be extremely anxious to hear from you how your health goes on; if it is any way re-establishing: or if Leith promises well: in short how you feel in the inner man.

No news worth any thing: only godly Bryan was in the inquisition yesterday, and half the country-side as witnesses against him. He still stands out steady and denying: but proof was led yesternight

of circumstances highly suspicious : almost *de facto:* one of the servant girls made faith that she upon a time rashly entered the house—to speak in your cant, " in the hour of cause."

I have waited on Armour since her return home: not from any the least view of reconciliation, but merely to ask for her health and—to you I will confess it—from a foolish hankering fondness—very ill placed indeed. The mother forbade me the house, nor did Jean shew the penitence that might have been expected. However the priest, I am informed, will give me a certificate as a single man, if I comply with the rules of the church, which for that very reason I intend to do.

I am going to put on sack-cloth and ashes this day. I am indulged so far as to appear in my own seat. *Peccavi, pater, miserere mei.* My book will be ready in a fortnight. If you have any subscribers return them by Connell. The Lord stand with the righteous : amen, amen. R. B.

[The minister who so boldly took it upon him to pronounce Burns a single man, after he had been married according to the law and usage of Scotland, was the Rev. Mr. Auld, of Mauchline. That he had no such power, no one can deny. The kirk of Scotland and the civil law were long at variance on the important subject of marriage. When a young pair were married by a magistrate, the minister of their parish not uncom-

monly caused them to endure a rebuke in the church before they were re-admitted to its bosom; this was sometimes resisted by the more obstinate or knowing of the peasantry, and ill blood, harsh words, and threats of kirk-censure were the consequence. Burns, instead of mounting the common seat of shame, was allowed to stand in his own seat. There might be other reasons for this: Auld was alarmed lest severity on his part should call forth a burning satire on the other; moreover, the repentance-stool had other occupants: the poet was one of seven who appeared, figuratively at least, in sack-cloth on the same day. In one of his memorandum books occurs the following singular entry:—"Mem: to enquire at Mr. M'Math whether, when a man has appeared in church for a child, and had another prior to it in point of time, but not discovered till after, he is liable for that one again. Note. The child was five and a half years old before the father was cited."

The kindness of James Grierson, Esq. of Dalgonar, in Dumfries-shire, has enabled me to add this letter to those addressed to John Richmond on love and poetry. It came too late to be inserted according to its date.—Ed.]

No. CXXX.

TO Mrs. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, New-year-day Morning, 1789.

This, dear Madam, is a morning of wishes, and would to God that I came under the apostle James's description!—*the prayer of a righteous man availeth much.* In that case, Madam, you should welcome in a year full of blessings: every thing that obstructs or disturbs tranquillity and self-enjoyment, should be removed, and every pleasure that frail humanity can taste, should be yours. I own myself so little a Presbyterian, that I approve of set times and seasons of more than ordinary acts of devotion, for breaking in on that habituated routine of life and thought, which is so apt to reduce our existence to a kind of instinct, or even sometimes, and with some minds, to a state very little superior to mere machinery.

This day; the first Sunday of May; a breezy, blue-skyed noon some time about the beginning, and a hoary morning and calm sunny day about the end, of autumn; these, time out of mind, have been with me a kind of holiday.

I believe I owe this to that glorious paper in the

Spectator, "The Vision of Mirza," a piece that struck my young fancy before I was capable of fixing an idea to a word of three syllables: "On the 5th day of the moon, which, according to the custom of my fore-fathers, I always *keep holy*, after having washed myself, and offered up my morning devotions, I ascended the high hill of Bagdat, in order to pass the rest of the day in meditation and prayer."

We know nothing, or next to nothing, of the substance or structure of our souls, so cannot account for those seeming caprices in them, that one should be particularly pleased with this thing, or struck with that, which, on minds of a different cast, makes no extraordinary impression. I have some favorite flowers in spring, among which are the mountain-daisy, the hare-bell, the fox-glove, the wild brier-rose, the budding birch, and the hoary hawthorn, that I view and hang over with particular delight. I never hear the loud, solitary whistle of the curlew in a summer noon, or the wild mixing cadence of a troop of grey plovers, in an autumnal morning, without feeling an elevation of soul like the enthusiasm of devotion or poetry. Tell me, my dear friend, to what can this be owing? Are we a piece of machinery, which, like the Eolian harp, passive, takes the impression of the passing accident? Or do these workings argue something within us above the trodden clod? I own myself partial to such proofs of those awful

and important realities—a God that made all things—man's immaterial and immortal nature—and a world of weal or woe beyond death and the grave.

R. B.

[That this mood of feeling and reflection was not uncommon in the household of "The Burns" the following letter will sufficiently shew:—

"*Mossgiel, 1st Jan.* 1789.

"DEAR BROTHER,

"I HAVE just finished my New-year's day breakfast in the usual form, which naturally makes me call to mind the days of former years, and the society in which we used to begin them; and when I look at our family vicissitudes, 'thro' the dark postern of time long elapsed,' I cannot help remarking to you, my dear brother, how good the God of Seasons is to us; and that, however some clouds may seem to lower over the portion of time before us, we have great reason to hope that all will turn out well.

"Your mother and sisters, with Robert the second, join me in the compliments of the season to you and Mrs. Burns, and beg you will remember us in the same manner to William, the first time you see him.

"I am, dear Brother, yours,

"GILBERT BURNS."]

No. CXXXI.

TO Dr. MOORE.

Ellisland, 4th Jan. 1789.

Sir,

As often as I think of writing to you, which has been three or four times every week these six months, it gives me something so like the idea of an ordinary-sized statue offering at a conversation with the Rhodian colossus, that my mind misgives me, and the affair always miscarries somewhere between purpose and resolve. I have at last got some business with you, and business letters are written by the style-book. I say my business is with you, Sir, for you never had any with me, except the business that benevolence has in the mansion of poverty.

The character and employment of a poet were formerly my pleasure, but are now my pride. I know that a very great deal of my late eclat was owing to the singularity of my situation, and the honest prejudice of Scotsmen; but still, as I said in the preface to my first edition, I do look upon myself as having some pretensions from Nature to the poetic character. I have not a doubt but

the knack, the aptitude, to learn the muses' trade, is a gift bestowed by Him "who forms the secret bias of the soul;"—but I as firmly believe, that *excellence* in the profession is the fruit of industry, labour, attention, and pains. At least I am resolved to try my doctrine by the test of experience. Another appearance from the press I put off to a very distant day, a day that may never arrive—but poesy I am determined to prosecute with all my vigour. Nature has given very few, if any, of the profession, the talents of shining in every species of composition. I shall try (for until trial it is impossible to know) whether she has qualified me to shine in any one The worst of it is, by the time one has finished a piece, it has been so often viewed and reviewed before the mental eye, that one loses in a good measure, the powers of critical discrimination. Here the best criterion I know is a friend—not only of abilities to judge, but with good-nature enough, like a prudent teacher with a young learner to praise perhaps a little more than is exactly just, lest the thin-skinned animal fall into that most deplorable of all poetic diseases—heart-breaking despondency of himself. Dare I, Sir, already immensely indebted to your goodness, ask the additional obligation of your being that friend to me? I inclose you an essay of mine in a walk of poesy to me entirely new; I mean the epistle addressed to R. G. Esq. or Robert Graham of Fintry, Esq. a gentleman of uncommon worth, to whom I lie

under very great obligations. The story of the poem, like most of my poems, is connected with my own story, and to give you the one, I must give you something of the other. I cannot boast of Mr. Creech's ingenuous fair dealing to me. He kept me hanging about Edinburgh from the 7th August 1787, until the 13th April 1788, before he would condescend to give me a statement of affairs; nor had I got it even then, but for an angry letter I wrote him, which irritated his pride. "I could" not a "tale" but a detail "unfold," but what am I that should speak against the Lord's anointed Bailie of Edinburgh.

I believe I shall, in whole, 100*l*. copy-right included, clear about 400*l*. some little odds; and even part of this depends upon wha the gentleman has yet to settle with me. I give you this information, because you did me the honour to interest yourself much in my welfare. I give you this information, but I give it to yourself only, for I am still much in the gentleman's mercy. Perhaps I injure the man in the idea I am sometimes tempted to have of him—God forbid I should! A little time will try, for in a month I shall go to town to wind up the business if possible.

To give the rest of my story in brief, I have married "my Jean," and taken a farm: with the first step I have every day more and more reason to be satisfied: with the last, it is rather the reverse. I have a younger brother, who supports my aged

mother; another still younger brother, and three sisters, in a farm. On my last return from Edinburgh, it cost me about 180*l*. to save them from ruin. Not that I have lost so much—I only interposed between my brother and his impending fate by the loan of so much. I give myself no airs on this, for it was mere selfishness on my part: I was conscious that the wrong scale of the balance was pretty heavily charged, and I thought that throwing a little filial piety and fraternal affection into the scale in my favor, might help to smooth matters at the *grand reckoning*. There is still one thing would make my circumstances quite easy: I have an excise officer's commission, and I live in the midst of a country division. My request to Mr. Graham, who is one of the commissioners of excise, was, if in his power, to procure me that division. If I were very sanguine, I might hope that some of my great patrons might procure me a treasury warrant for supervisor, surveyor-general, &c.

Thus, secure of a livelihood, "to thee, sweet poetry, delightful maid," I would consecrate my future days. R. B.

[The poet was not slow in perceiving that Ellisland was not the bargain he had reckoned on. He had intimated this before to Margaret Chalmers; and time only confirmed his surmises. Well might he apply to himself the words of Scripture, "And behold nothing which this man sets his heart upon shall prosper."—Ed.]

No. CXXXII.

TO Mr. ROBERT AINSLIE.

Ellisland, Jan. 6, 1789.

Many happy returns of the season to you, my dear Sir! May you be comparatively happy up to your comparative worth among the sons of men; which wish would, I am sure, make you one of the most blest of the human race.

I do not know if passing a "Writer to the signet" be a trial of scientific merit, or a mere business of friends and interest. However it be, let me quote you my two favourite passages, which, though I have repeated them ten thousand times, still they rouse my manhood and steel my resolution like inspiration.

———————— "On Reason build resolve,
That column of true majesty in man."
YOUNG.

"Hear, Alfred, hero of the state,
Thy genius heaven's high will declare;
The triumph of the truly great,
Is never, never to despair!
Is never to despair!"
MASQUE OF ALFRED.

I grant you enter the lists of life, to struggle for bread, business, notice, and distinction, in common

with hundreds.—But who are they? Men, like yourself, and of that aggregate body your compeers, seven tenths of them come short of your advantages natural and accidental; while two of those that remain, either neglect their parts, as flowers blooming in a desert, or mis-spend their strength, like a bull goring a bramble bush.

But to change the theme: I am still catering for Johnson's publication; and among others, I have brushed up the following old favourite song a little, with a view to your worship. I have only altered a word here and there; but if you like the humour of it, we shall think of a stanza or two to add to it.

R. B.

[The name of the song which the poet brushed up and sent to his friend, is no where intimated. He was at this period, and indeed for years after, collecting and amending scraps of old song for the Musical Museum. Ed.]

No. CXXXIII.

TO

PROFESSOR DUGALD STEWART.

Ellisland, 20th Jan. 1789.

SIR,

THE inclosed sealed packet I sent to Edinburgh, a few days after I had the happiness of meeting you in Ayrshire, but you were gone for the Continent. I have now added a few more of my productions, those for which I am indebted to the Nithsdale Muses. The piece inscribed to R. G. Esq. is a copy of verses I sent Mr. Graham, of Fintry, accompanying a request for his assistance in a matter, to me, of very great moment. To that gentleman I am already doubly indebted: for deeds of kindness of serious import to my dearest interests, done in a manner grateful to the delicate feelings of sensibility. This poem is a species of composition new to me, but I do not intend it shall be my last essay of the kind, as you will see by the "Poet's Progress." These fragments, if my design succeed, are but a small part of the intended whole. I propose it shall be the work of my utmost exertions, ripened by years; of course I do not wish it much known.

The fragment beginning "A little upright, pert, tart, &c." I have not shewn to man living, till I now send it you. It forms the postulata, the axioms, the definition of a character, which, if it appear at all, shall be placed in a variety of lights. This particular part I send you merely as a sample of my hand at portrait-sketching; but, lest idle conjecture should pretend to point out the original, please to let it be for your single, sole inspection.

Need I make any apology for this trouble, to a gentleman who has treated me with such marked benevolence and peculiar kindness—who has entered into my interests with so much zeal, and on whose critical decisions I can so fully depend? A poet as I am by trade, these decisions are to me of the last consequence. My late transient acquaintance among some of the mere rank and file of greatness, I resign with ease; but to the distinguished champions of genius and learning, I shall be ever ambitious of being known. The native genius and accurate discernment in Mr. Stewart's critical strictures; the justness, (iron justice, for he has no bowels of compassion for a poor poetic sinner) of Dr. Gregory's remarks, and the delicacy of Professor Dalzel's taste, I shall ever revere.

I shall be in Edinburgh some time next month.

I have the honor to be, Sir,

Your highly obliged, and very humble servant,

R. B.

[The poet alludes to the merciless, though not wholly unmerited, strictures of Dr. Gregory on the poem of the "Wounded Hare," when he says he has no bowels of compassion for a poor poetic sinner. Stewart was more gentle in his criticisms: of him and his lady—a poetess of no mean powers—Burns ever spoke in terms almost rapturous; they were kind to him when friends were few and praise scanty—he was not a man to forget such obligations.—Ed.]

No. CXXXIV.

TO BISHOP GEDDES.

Ellisland, 3d Feb. 1789.

Venerable Father,

As I am conscious that wherever I am, you do me the honor to interest yourself in my welfare, it gives me pleasure to inform you, that I am here at last, stationary in the serious business of life, and have now not only the retired leisure, but the hearty inclination, to attend to those great and important questions—what I am? where I am? and for what I am destined?

In that first concern, the conduct of the man, there was ever but one side on which I was habitually blameable, and there I have secured myself in the way pointed out by Nature and Nature's God. I was sensible that, to so helpless a creature as a poor poet, a wife and family were incumbrances, which a species of prudence would bid him shun; but when the alternative was, being at eternal warfare with myself, on account of habitual follies, to give them no worse name, which no general example, no licentious wit, no sophistical infidelity, would, to me, ever justify, I must have been a fool to have hesitated, and a madman to have made another choice. Besides, I had in "my Jean" a long and much-loved fellow-creature's happiness or misery among my hands, and who could trifle with such a deposit?

In the affair of a livelihood, I think myself tolerably secure: I have good hopes of my farm, but should they fail, I have an excise commission, which, on my simple petition, will, at any time procure me bread. There is a certain stigma affixed to the character of an excise officer, but I do not pretend to borrow honour from my profession; and though the salary be comparatively small, it is luxury to any thing that the first twenty-five years of my life taught me to expect.

Thus, with a rational aim and method in life, you may easily guess, my reverend and much-honoured friend, that my characteristical trade is not

forgotten. I am, if possible, more than ever an enthusiast to the muses. I am determined to study man and nature, and in that view incessantly; and to try if the ripening and corrections of years can enable me to produce something worth preserving.

You will see in your book, which I beg your pardon for detaining so long, that I have been tuning my lyre on the banks of Nith. Some large poetic plans that are floating in my imagination, or partly put in execution, I shall impart to you when I have the pleasure of meeting with you; which, if you are then in Edinburgh, I shall have about the beginning of March.

That acquaintance, worthy Sir, with which you were pleased to honour me, you must still allow me to challenge; for with whatever unconcern I give up my transient connexion with the merely Great, I cannot lose the patronizing notice of the learned and good, without the bitterest regret. R. B.

[Alexander Geddes, to whom this letter is addressed, was a scholar and controversialist; a poet, too, and one of the bishops of the broken remnant of the ancient Catholic church of Scotland. He is known in verse as the author of a very clever rustic poem, beginning thus:—

"There was a wee bit wifickie,
And she gaed to the fair;
She got a wee bit drappikie,
Which cost her meikle care:
The drink gaed to the wifie's head,
And she was like to spue,
And 'O!' quo' this wee wifickie,
'I wish I binna fou.'"

Nor is he unknown as the translator of one of the books of the Iliad, which he Englished in opposition to Cowper. In his controversies and conversation he was so liberal that he incurred the displeasure of some of his brethren in Scotland, which induced him to remove to London, where he was patronized by Lord Petre, and undertook a "New Translation of the Bible," the prospectus to which is said to have alarmed both Jews and Christians. He was a man of undoubted talents and learning; his temper was quick, and his vanity not little. He died 20th February, 1802, in the sixty-fifth year of his age.

The volume which Burns sent to the bishop was the Edinburgh copy of his poems, with the addition, in his own handwriting, of such compositions as the muse of Nithsdale had inspired. The blanks, too, in the print were all filled up. This precious book belongs to Margaret Geddes, the wife of my friend John Hyslop, surgeon, Finsbury-square, grandson of John Maxwell, of Terraughty, to whom the poet addressed one of his most spirited epistles; it is in good preservation, and in equally excellent hands.—Ed.]

No. CXXXV.

TO Mr. JAMES BURNESS.

Ellisland, 9*th Feb.* 1789.

My dear Sir,

Why I did not write to you long ago is what, even on the rack, I could not answer. If you can in your mind form an idea of indolence, dissipation, hurry, cares, change of country, entering on untried scenes of life, all combined, you will save me the trouble of a blushing apology. It could not be want of regard for a man for whom I had a high esteem before I knew him—an esteem, which has much increased since I did know him; and this caveat entered, I shall plead guilty to any other indictment with which you shall please to charge me.

After I parted from you, for many months my life was one continued scene of dissipation. Here at last I am become stationary, and have taken a farm and—a wife.

The farm is beautifully situated on the Nith, a large river that runs by Dumfries, and falls into the Solway frith. I have gotten a lease of my farm as long as I pleased; but how it may turn out is just a guess, and it is yet to improve and enclose, &c.;

however, I have good hopes of my bargain on the whole.

My wife is my Jean, with whose story you are partly acquainted. I found I had a much loved fellow creature's happiness or misery among my hands, and I durst not trifle with so sacred a deposit. Indeed I have not any reason to repent the step I have taken, as I have attached myself to a very good wife, and have shaken myself loose of every bad failing.

I have found my book a very profitable business, and with the profits of it I have begun life pretty decently. Should fortune not favour me in farming, as I have no great faith in her fickle ladyship, I have provided myself in another resource, which, however some folks may affect to despise it, is still a comfortable shift in the day of misfortune. In the heyday of my fame, a gentleman whose name at least I dare say you know, as his estate lies somewhere near Dundee, Mr. Graham, of Fintry, one of the Commissioners of Excise, offered me the commission of an excise officer. I thought it prudent to accept the offer; and accordingly I took my instructions, and have my commission by me. Whether I may ever do duty, or be a penny the better for it, is what I do not know; but I have the comfortable assurance, that, come whatever ill fate will, I can, on my simple petition to the excise-board, get into employ.

We have lost poor uncle Robert this winter. He

has long been very weak, and with very little alteration on him, he expired 3d Jan.

His son William has been with me this winter, and goes in May to be an apprentice to a mason. His other son, the eldest, John, comes to me I expect in summer. They are both remarkably stout young fellows, and promise to do well. His only daughter, Fanny, has been with me ever since her father's death, and I purpose keeping her in my family till she be quite woman grown, and fit for better service. She is one of the cleverest girls, and has one of the most amiable dispositions I have ever seen.

All friends in this country and Ayrshire are well. Remember me to all friends in the north. My wife joins me in compliments to Mrs. B. and family.

I am ever, my dear Cousin,
Yours, sincerely,
R. B.

[Fanny Burns, the poet's relation, merited all the commendations he has here bestowed. I remember her while she lived at Ellisland, and better still as the wife of Adam Armour, the brother of Bonnie Jean; she went with her husband to Mauchline, and lived long and respectably. Her son is now with his paternal uncle, pursuing successfully the honourable calling of a London merchant.—Ed.]

No. CXXXVI.

TO Mrs. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 4th March, 1789.

Here am I, my honoured friend, returned safe from the capital. To a man, who has a home, however humble or remote—if that home is like mine, the scene of domestic comfort—the bustle of Edinburgh will soon be a business of sickening disgust.

"Vain pomp and glory of this world, I hate you!"

When I must skulk into a corner, lest the rattling equipage of some gaping blockhead should mangle me in the mire, I am tempted to exclaim—"What merits has he had, or what demerit have I had, in some state of pre-existence, that he is ushered into this state of being with the sceptre of rule, and the key of riches in his puny fist, and I am kicked into the world, the sport of folly, or the victim of pride?" I have read somewhere of a monarch, (in Spain I think it was), who was so out of humour with the Ptolemean system of astronomy, that he said, had he been of the Creator's council, he could have saved him a great deal of labour and absurdity. I will not defend this blasphemous speech; but often,

as I have glided with humble stealth through the pomp of Princes' street, it has suggested itself to me, as an improvement on the present human figure, that a man, in proportion to his own conceit of his consequence in the world, could have pushed out the longitude of his common size, as a snail pushes out his horns, or as we draw out a perspective. This trifling alteration, not to mention the prodigious saving it would be in the tear and wear of the neck and limb-sinews of many of his majesty's liege subjects, in the way of tossing the head and tiptoe strutting, would evidently turn out a vast advantage, in enabling us at once to adjust the ceremonials in making a bow, or making way to a great man, and that too within a second of the precise spherical angle of reverence, or an inch of the particular point of respectful distance, which the important creature itself requires; as a measuring-glance at its towering altitude, would determine the affair like instinct.

You are right Madam, in your idea of poor Mylne's poem, which he has addressed to me. The piece has a good deal of merit, but it has one great fault—it is, by far, too long. Besides, my success has encouraged such a shoal of ill-spawned monsters to crawl into public notice, under the title of Scottish Poets, that the very term Scottish Poetry borders on the burlesque. When I write to Mr. Carfrae, I shall advise him rather to try one of his deceased friend's English pieces. I am prodigiously hurried with my own matters, else I would have requested

a perusal of all Mylne's poetic performances; and would have offered his friends my assistance in either selecting or correcting what would be proper for the press. What it is that occupies me so much, and perhaps a little oppresses my present spirits, shall fill up a paragraph in some future letter. In the mean time, allow me to close this epistle with a few lines done by a friend of mine * * * * *. I give you them, that, as you have seen the original, you may guess whether one or two alterations I have ventured to make in them, be any real improvement.

Like the fair plant that from our touch withdraws,
Shrink, mildly fearful, even from applause,
Be all a mother's fondest hope can dream,
And all you are, my charming * * * *, seem.
Straight as the fox-glove, ere her bells disclose,
Mild as the maiden-blushing hawthorn blows,
Fair as the fairest of each lovely kind,
Your form shall be the image of your mind;
Your manners shall so true your soul express,
That all shall long to know the worth they guess;
Congenial hearts shall greet with kindred love,
And even sick'ning envy must approve."

R. B.

[These beautiful lines, we have reason to believe, are the production of the lady to whom this letter is addressed. Ed.]

No. CXXXVII.

TO THE Rev. P. CARFRAE.

1789.

Rev. Sir,

I do not recollect that I have ever felt a severer pang of shame, than on looking at the date of your obliging letter which accompanied Mr. Mylne's poem.

I am much to blame: the honour Mr. Mylne has done me, greatly enhanced in its value by the endearing, though melancholy circumstance, of its being the last production of his muse, deserved a better return.

I have, as you hint, thought of sending a copy of the poem to some periodical publication; but, on second thoughts, I am afraid that, in the present case, it would be an improper step. My success, perhaps as much accidental as merited, has brought an inundation of nonsense under the name of Scottish poetry. Subscription-bills for Scottish poems, have so dunned, and daily do dun the public, that the very name is in danger of contempt. For these reasons, if publishing any of Mr. Mylne's poems in a magazine, &c. be at all prudent, in my opinion it

certainly should not be a Scottish poem. The profits of the labours of a man of genius, are, I hope, as honorable as any profits whatever; and Mr. Mylne's relations are most justly entitled to that honest harvest, which fate has denied himself to reap. But let the friends of Mr. Mylne's fame (among whom I crave the honour of ranking myself), always keep in eye his respectability as a man and as a poet, and take no measure that, before the world knows any thing about him, would risk his name and character being classed with the fools of the times.

I have, Sir, some experience of publishing; and the way in which I would proceed with Mr. Mylne's poems, is this:—I will publish, in two or three English and Scottish public papers, any one of his English poems which should, by private judges, be thought the most excellent, and mention it, at the same time, as one of the productions of a Lothian farmer, of respectable character, lately deceased, whose poems his friends had it in idea to publish, soon, by subscription, for the sake of his numerous family:—not in pity to that family, but in justice to what his friends think the poetic merits of the deceased; and to secure, in the most effectual manner, to those tender connexions, whose right it is, the pecuniary reward of those merits. R. B.

[The Rev. Peter Carfrae gave the following account of Mylne to the poet of Ayrshire. "He was a man

highly respectable for every accomplishment and virtue which adorns the character of a man or a Christian. To a great degree of literature, of taste, and poetic genius, was added an invincible modesty of temper, which prevented, in some measure, his figuring in life, and confined the perfect knowledge of his character and talents to the small circle of his chosen friends. He was untimely taken from us, a few weeks ago, by an inflammatory fever, in the prime of life—beloved by all who enjoyed his acquaintance, and lamented by all who have any regard for virtue or genius. There is a woe pronounced in scripture against the person whom all men speak well of; if ever that woe fell upon the head of mortal man, it fell upon him. He has left behind him a considerable number of compositions, chiefly poetical; sufficient, I imagine, to make a large octavo volume. In particular, two complete and regular tragedies, a farce of three acts, and some smaller poems on different subjects. It falls to my share, who have lived in the most intimate and uninterrupted friendship with him from my youth upwards, to transmit to you the verses he wrote on the publication of your incomparable poems. It is probable they were his last, as they were found in his scrutoire, folded up in the form of a letter addressed to you, and, I imagine, were only prevented from being sent by himself, by that melancholy dispensation which we still bemoan."—Ed.]

No. CXXXVIII.

TO Dr. MOORE.

Ellisland, 23rd March, 1789.

Sir,

The gentleman who will deliver you this is a Mr. Nielson, a worthy clergyman in my neighbourhood, and a very particular acquaintance of mine. As I have troubled him with this packet, I must turn him over to your goodness, to recompense him for it in a way in which he much needs your assistance, and where you can effectually serve him:—Mr. Nielson is on his way for France, to wait on his Grace of Queensberry, on some little business of a good deal of importance to him, and he wishes for your instructions respecting the most eligible mode of travelling, &c. for him, when he has crossed the channel. I should not have dared to take this liberty with you, but that I am told, by those who have the honour of your personal acquaintance, that to be a poor honest Scotchman is a letter of recommendation to you, and that to have it in your

power to serve such a character, gives you much pleasure.

The inclosed ode is a compliment to the memory of the late Mrs. Oswald, of Auchencruive. You, probably, knew her personally, an honour of which I cannot boast; but I spent my early years in her neighbourhood, and among her servants and tenants. I know that she was detested with the most heart-felt cordiality. However, in the particular part of her conduct which roused my poetic wrath, she was much less blameable. In January last, on my road to Ayrshire, I had put up at Bailie Whigham's, in Sanquhar, the only tolerable inn in the place. The frost was keen, and the grim evening and howling wind were ushering in a night of snow and drift. My horse and I were both much fatigued with the labours of the day, and just as my friend the Bailie and I were bidding defiance to the storm, over a smoaking bowl, in wheels the funeral pageantry of the late great Mrs. Oswald, and poor I am forced to brave all the horrors of the tempestuous night, and jade my horse, my young favorite horse, whom I had just christened Pegasus, twelve miles farther on, through the wildest moors and hills of Ayrshire, to New Cumnock, the next inn. The powers of poesy and prose sink under me, when I would describe what I felt. Suffice it to say, that when a good fire at New Cumnock had so far recovered my frozen sinews, I sat down and wrote the inclosed ode.

I was at Edinburgh lately, and settled finally with Mr. Creech; and I must own, that, at last, he has been amicable and fair with me. R. B.

[The Rev. Edward Nielson, whom the poet introduces to the notice of Moore, was minister of Kirkbean, on the Solway:—he was eloquent and learned, and not without natural talents, but he was a jovial man, and loved good cheer and merry company, more than became his station. He lived on a smuggling coast; numbered among his parishioners men concerned in the contraband trade, nor did he escape the suspicion of silently permitting a traffic which injured the morals of his people more deeply than either his admonitions or example could mend.—Ed.]

No. CXXXIX.

TO MR. HILL.

Ellisland, 2nd April, 1789.

I WILL make no excuse, my dear Bibliopolus, (GOD forgive me for murdering language!) that I have sat down to write you on this vile paper.

It is economy, Sir; it is that cardinal virtue, prudence; so I beg you will sit down, and either compose or borrow a panegyric. If you are going to borrow, apply to * * * * * to compose, or rather to compound, something very clever on my remarkable frugality; that I write to one of my most esteemed friends on this wretched paper, which was originally intended for the venal fist of some drunken exciseman, to take dirty notes in a miserable vault of an ale-cellar.

O Frugality! thou mother of ten thousand blessings—thou cook of fat beef and dainty greens!—thou manufacturer of warm Shetland hose, and comfortable surtouts!—thou old housewife, darning thy decayed stockings with thy ancient spectacles on thy aged nose!—lead me, hand me in thy clutching palsied fist, up those heights, and through those thickets, hitherto inaccessible, and impervious to my anxious, weary feet:—not those Parnassian crags, bleak and barren, where the hungry worshippers of fame are, breathless, clambering, hanging

between heaven and hell; but those glittering cliffs of Potosi, where the all-sufficient, all-powerful deity, Wealth, holds his immediate court of joys and pleasures; where the sunny exposure of plenty, and the hot walls of profusion, produce those blissful fruits of luxury, exotics in this world, and natives of paradise!—Thou withered sybil, my sage conductress, usher me into thy refulgent, adored presence!—The power, splendid and potent as he now is, was once the puling nursling of thy faithful care, and tender arms! Call me thy son, thy cousin, thy kinsman, or favourite, and adjure the god by the scenes of his infant years, no longer to repulse me as a stranger, or an alien, but to favour me with his peculiar countenance and protection!—He daily bestows his greatest kindness on the undeserving and the worthless—assure him, that I bring ample documents of meritorious demerits! Pledge yourself for me, that, for the glorious cause of LUCRE, I will do any thing, be any thing—but the horse-leech of private oppression, or the vulture of public robbery!

But to descend from heroics.

I want a Shakespeare; I want likewise an English dictionary—Johnson's, I suppose, is best. In these and all my prose commissions, the cheapest is always the best for me. There is a small debt of honour that I owe Mr. Robert Cleghorn, in Saughton Mills, my worthy friend, and your well-wisher. Please give him, and urge him to take it, the first

time you see him, ten shillings worth of any thing you have to sell, and place it to my account.

The library scheme that I mentioned to you, is already begun, under the direction of Captain Riddel. There is another in emulation of it going on at Closeburn, under the auspices of Mr. Monteith, of Closeburn, which will be on a greater scale than ours. Capt. Riddel gave his infant society a great many of his old books, else I had written you on that subject; but, one of these days, I shall trouble you with a commission for "The Monkland Friendly Society"—a copy of *The Spectator*, *Mirror*, and *Lounger*, *Man of Feeling*, *Man of the World*, *Guthrie's Geographical Grammar*, with some religious pieces, will likely be our first order.

When I grow richer, I will write to you on gilt post, to make amends for this sheet. At present, every guinea has a five guinea errand with

My dear Sir,

Your faithful, poor, but honest friend,

R. B.

[The Monkland Society existed only while Captain Riddel lived, whose activity and taste aided in its establishment and continuance. Such clubs, when wisely conducted, are extremely beneficial: they diffuse useful and elegant knowledge among the rude and unlettered, and direct men's minds to the contemplation of what is worthy and noble. History, biography, voyages and travels, are chiefly required; the peasantry of the north are sufficiently well acquainted with divinity and verse. —Ed.]

No. CXL.

TO Mrs. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 4th April, 1789.

I no sooner hit on any poetic plan or fancy, but I wish to send it to you: and if knowing and reading these give half the pleasure to you, that communicating them to you gives to me, I am satisfied.

I have a poetic whim in my head, which I at present dedicate, or rather inscribe, to the Right Hon. Charles James Fox; but how long that fancy may hold, I cannot say. A few of the first lines I have just rough-sketched as follows:

SKETCH.

How wisdom and folly meet, mix, and unite;
How virtue and vice blend their black and their white;
How genius, the illustrious father of fiction,
Confounds rule and law, reconciles contradiction—
I sing: If these mortals, the critics, should bustle,
I care not, not I, let the critics go whistle.

But now for a patron, whose name and whose glory,
At once may illustrate and honour my story.

Thou first of our orators, first of our wits,
Yet whose parts and acquirements seem mere lucky hits;
With knowledge so vast, and with judgment so strong,
No man with the half of 'em e'er went far wrong;
With passions so potent, and fancies so bright,
No man with the half of 'em e'er went quite right,
A sorry, poor misbegot son of the muses,
For using thy name offers fifty excuses.

[*See vol.* iii. *page* 103.]

On the 20th current I hope to have the honour of assuring you, in person, how sincerely I am—

R. B.

No. CXLI.

TO Mrs. M'MURDO,

DRUMLANRIG.

Ellisland, 2nd May, 1789.

Madam,

I have finished the piece which had the happy fortune to be honoured with your approbation; and never did little miss with more sparkling pleasure shew her applauded sampler to partial mamma, than I now send my poem to you and Mr. M'Murdo if he is returned to Drumlanrig. You cannot easily imagine what thin-skinned animals—what sensitive plants poor poets are. How do we shrink into the embittered corner of self-abasement, when neglected or condemned by those to whom we look up! and how do we, in erect importance, add another cubit to our stature on being noticed and applauded by those whom we honour and respect! My late visit to Drumlanrig has I can tell you, Madam, given me a balloon waft up Parnassus, where on my fancied elevation I regard my poetic self with no small degree of complacency. Surely with all their sins, the rhyming tribe are not ungrateful creatures.—I

recollect your goodness to your humble guest—I see Mr. McMurdo adding to the politeness of the gentleman, the kindness of a friend, and my heart swells as it would burst, with warm emotions and ardent wishes! It may be it is not gratitude—it may be a mixed sensation. That strange, shifting, doubling animal MAN is so generally, at best, but a negative, often a worthless creature, that we cannot see real goodness and native worth without feeling the bosom glow with sympathetic approbation.

With every sentiment of grateful respect,

I have the honour to be,

Madam,

Your obliged and grateful humble servant,

R. B.

[The poem alluded to was the song of Bonnie Jean; the heroine is the eldest daughter of Mrs. McMurdo, and sister to Phillis—their charms give lustre to some of the poet's happiest lyrics.—ED.]

No. CXLII.

TO MR. CUNNINGHAM.

Ellisland, 4th May, 1789.

MY DEAR SIR,

YOUR *duty-free* favour of the 26th April I received two days ago; I will not say I perused it with pleasure; that is the cold compliment of ceremony; I perused it, Sir, with delicious satisfaction; — in short, it is such a letter, that not you, nor your friend, but the legislature, by express proviso in their postage laws, should frank. A letter informed with the soul of friendship is such an honour to human nature, that they should order it free ingress and egress to and from their bags and mails, as an encouragement and mark of distinction to super-eminent virtue.

I have just put the last hand to a little poem, which I think will be something to your taste. One morning lately, as I was out pretty early in the fields, sowing some grass seeds, I heard the burst of a shot from a neighbouring plantation, and presently a poor little wounded hare came crippling by me. You will guess my indignation at the inhuman fellow who could shoot a hare at this season, when

all of them have young ones. Indeed there is something in that business of destroying for our sport individuals in the animal creation that do not injure us materially, which I could never reconcile to my ideas of virtue.

Inhuman man! curse on thy barb'rous art,
And blasted be thy murder-aiming eye!
May never pity sooth thee with a sigh,
Nor ever pleasure glad thy cruel heart!

[*See vol.* iii. *page* 107.]

Let me know how you like my poem. I am doubtful whether it would not be an improvement to keep out the last stanza but one altogether.

Cruikshank is a glorious production of the author of man. You, he, and the noble Colonel of the Crochallan Fencibles are to me

"Dear as the ruddy drops which warm my heart."

I have a good mind to make verses on you all, to the tune of "*Three guid fellows ayont the glen.*"

R. B.

[Dr. Gregory addressed the following criticism to Burns on his poem of the Wounded Hare. The poet said of it, "Gregory is a good man; but he loves to crucify one. I believe in his iron justice—but, like the devils, I believe and tremble."—

"DEAR SIR,

"I TAKE the first leisure hour I could command, to thank you for your letter, and the copy of verses inclosed in it. As there is real poetic merit, I mean both fancy and tenderness, and some happy expressions

in them, I think they well deserve that you should revise them carefully, and polish them to the utmost. This, I am sure, you can do if you please, for you have great command both of expression and of rhymes; and you may judge from the two last pieces of Mrs. Hunter's poetry, that I gave you, how much correctness and high polish enhance the value of such compositions. As you desire it, I shall with great freedom give you my *most rigorous* criticisms on your verses.* I wish you would give me another edition of them, much amended, and I will send it to Mrs. Hunter, who I am sure will have much pleasure in reading it. Pray give me likewise for myself, and her too, a copy (as much amended as you please) of the 'Water Fowl on Loch Turit.'

"The 'Wounded Hare' is a pretty good subject; but the measure or stanza you have chosen for it is not a good one: it does not *flow* well; and the rhyme of the fourth line is almost lost by its distance from the first; and the two interposed, close rhymes. If I were you, I would put it into a different stanza yet.

"Stanza 1. The execrations in the first two lines are too strong or coarse; but they may pass. 'Murder-aiming' is a bad compound epithet, and not very intelligible. 'Blood-stained,' in stanza iii. line 4, has the same fault; *bleeding* bosom is infinitely better. You have accustomed yourself to such epithets, and have no notion how stiff and quaint they appear to others, and how incongruous with poetic fancy and tender sentiments. Suppose Pope had written, 'Why that blood-stained bosom gored,' how would you have liked it? *Form* is neither a poetic, nor a dignified, nor a plain, common word: it is a mere sportsman's word: unsuitable to pathetic or serious poetry.

"'Mangled' is a coarse word. 'Innocent' in this sense is a nursery word; but both may pass.

"Stanza 4. 'Who will now provide that life a mother only can bestow,' will not do at all: it is not grammar—it is not intelligible. Do you mean 'provide for that life which the mother had bestowed and used to provide for?'

"There was a ridiculous slip of the pen, 'Feeling' (I suppose) for 'Fellow,' in the title of your copy of verses; but even fellow would be wrong: it is but a colloquial and vulgar word, unsuitable to your sentiments. 'Shot' is improper too. On seeing a *person* (or a sportsman) wound a hare; it is needless to add with what weapon: but, if you think otherwise, you should say, *with a fowling piece.*"—Ed.]

No. CXLIII.

TO Mr. SAMUEL BROWN.

Mossgiel, 4th May, 1789.

Dear Uncle,

This, I hope, will find you and your conjugal yoke-fellow in your good old way; I am impatient to know if the Ailsa fowling be commenced for this season yet, as I want three or four stones of feathers, and I hope you will bespeak them for me. It would be a vain attempt for me to enumerate the various transactions I have been engaged in since I saw you last, but this know,—I am engaged in a *smuggling trade*, and God knows if ever any poor man experienced better returns, two for one, but as freight and delivery have turned out so dear, I am thinking of taking out a license and beginning in fair trade. I have taken a farm on the borders of the Nith, and in imitation of the old Patriarchs, get men-servants and maid-servants, and flocks and herds, and beget sons and daughters.

Your obedient Nephew,

R. B.

[Samuel Brown was brother to the poet's mother, and seems to have been a joyous and tolerant sort of person, for his nephew shews little of that understrapping virtue called delicacy in relating his fortunes. He seems to have been somewhat ignorant too of the poet's motions, for certainly the license to which he alludes was taken out nearly a twelvemonth before the letter was written. —Ed.]

No. CXLIV.

TO RICHARD BROWN.

Mauchline, 21st May, 1789.

My Dear Friend,

I was in the country by accident, and hearing of your safe arrival, I could not resist the temptation of wishing you joy on your return, wishing you would write to me before you sail again, wishing you would always set me down as your bosom friend, wishing you long life and prosperity, and that evcy good thing may attend you, wishing Mrs. Brown and your little ones as free of the evils of this world, as is consistent with humanity, wishing you and she were to make two at the ensuing lying-in, with which Mrs. B. threatens very soon to favour me, wishing I had longer time to write to you at present; and, finally, wishing that if there is to be another state of existence, Mr. B., Mrs. B., our little ones, and both families, and you and I, in some snug retreat, may make a jovial party to all eternity!

My Direction is at Ellisland, near Dumfries.

Your's, R. B.

No. CXLV.

TO Mr. JAMES HAMILTON.

Ellisland, 26th May, 1789.

Dear Sir,

I send you by John Glover, Carrier, the above account for Mr. Turnbull, as I suppose you know his address.

I would fain offer, my dear Sir, a word of sympathy with your misfortunes; but it is a tender string, and I know not how to touch it. It is easy to flourish a set of high-flown sentiments on the subjects that would give great satisfaction to—a breast quite at ease; but as one observes, who was very seldom mistaken in the theory of life, "The heart knoweth its own sorrows, and a stranger intermeddleth not therewith."

Among some distressful emergencies that I have experienced in life, I ever laid this down as my foundation of comfort—*That he who has lived the life of an honest man, has by no means lived in vain!*

With every wish for your welfare and future success,

I am, my dear Sir,

Sincerely yours,

R. B.

[James Hamilton was a grocer in Glasgow, and interested himself early in the fame and fortunes of the poet. That he had not the success in life which his friend imagined he merited, seems plain by this letter, and perhaps there are few who will not feel that Burns has, with uncommon delicacy, condoled with him in his misfortunes, and suggested a topic of consolation at once rational and religious.—Ed.]

No. CXLVI.

TO WILLIAM CREECH, ESQ.

Ellisland, 30th May, 1789.

Sir,

I had intended to have troubled you with a long letter, but at present the delightful sensations of an omnipotent tooth-ache so engross all my inner man, as to put it out of my power even to write nonsense. However, as in duty bound, I approach my bookseller with an offering in my hand—a few poetic clinches, aad a song:—To expect any other kind of offering from the Rhyming Tribe would be to know them much less than you do. I do not pretend that there is much merit in these *morceaux,* but I have two reasons for sending them; *primo,* they are mostly ill-natured, so are in unison with my present feelings, while fifty troops of infernal spirits are driving post from ear to ear along my jaw bones; and *secondly,* they are so short, that you cannot leave

off in the middle, and so hurt my pride in the idea that you found any work of mine too heavy to get through.

I have a request to beg of you, and I not only beg of you, but conjure you, by all your wishes and by all your hopes, that the muse will spare the satiric wink in the moment of your foibles; that she will warble the song of rapture round your hymeneal couch; and that she will shed on your turf the honest tear of elegiac gratitude! Grant my request as speedily as possible—send me by the very first fly or coach for this place three copies of the last edition of my poems, which place to my account.

Now may the good things of prose, and the good things of verse, come among thy hands, until they be filled with the *good things of this life*, prayeth

R. B.

[The poetic address to "The Tooth-ache" seems to be the offspring of this period. The "venomed stang" was fully felt during the composition of the epistle: but no one, save a sufferer under this "hell of a' diseases," can sympathize in the expression that fifty troops of infernal spirits were driving post from ear to ear along his jaw-bones! This letter may be taken as another proof of the poet's desire to render himself acceptable to his friends: he seldom folded up one without enclosing in it, or inserting in one of the pages, a short poem or one of his sweetest lyrics.—Ed.]

No. CXLVII.

TO MR. McAULEY,

OF DUMBARTON.

Ellisland, 4th June, 1789.

DEAR SIR,

THOUGH I am not without my fears respecting my fate, at that grand, universal inquest of right and wrong, commonly called *The Last Day*, yet I trust there is one sin, which that arch-vagabond, Satan, who I understand is to be king's evidence, cannot throw in my teeth, I mean ingratitude. There is a certain pretty large quantum of kindness for which I remain, and from inability, I fear must still remain, your debtor; but though unable to repay the debt, I assure you, Sir, I shall ever warmly remember the obligation. It gives me the sincerest pleasure to hear by my old acquaintance, Mr. Kennedy, that you are, in immortal Allan's language, "Hale, and weel, and living;" and that your charming family are well, and promising to be an amiable and respectable addition to the company of performers, whom the Great Manager of the Drama of Man is bringing into action for the succeeding age.

With respect to my welfare, a subject in which you once warmly and effectively interested yourself, I am here in my old way, holding my plough, marking the growth of my corn, or the health of my dairy; and at times sauntering by the delightful windings of the Nith, on the margin of which I have built my humble domicile, praying for seasonable weather, or holding an intrigue with the Muses; the only gypsies with whom I have now any intercourse. As I am entered into the holy state of matrimony, I trust my face is turned completely Zion-ward; and as it is a rule with all honest fellows to repeat no grievances, I hope that the little poetic licences of former days will of course fall under the oblivious influence of some good-natured statute of celestial prescription. In my family devotion, which, like a good presbyterian, I occasionally give to my household folks, I am extremely fond of the psalm, "Let not the errors of my youth, &c." and that other, "Lo, children are God's heritage, &c." in which last Mrs. Burns, who by the bye has a glorious "wood-note wild" at either old song or psalmody, joins me with the pathos of Handel's Messiah. R. B.

No. CXLVIII.

TO MR. ROBERT AINSLIE.

Ellisland, 8th June, 1789.

My Dear Friend,

I am perfectly ashamed of myself when I look at the date of your last. It is not that I forget the friend of my heart and the companion of my peregrinations; but I have been condemned to drudgery beyond sufferance, though not, thank God, beyond redemption. I have had a collection of poems by a lady put into my hands to prepare them for the press; which horrid task, with sowing corn with my own hand, a parcel of masons, wrights, plasterers, &c. to attend to, roaming on business through Ayrshire—all this was against me, and the very first dreadful article was of itself too much for me.

13th. I have not had a moment to spare from incessant toil since the 8th. Life, my dear Sir, is a serious matter. You know by experience that a man's individual self is a good deal, but believe me,

a wife and family of children, whenever you have the honour to be a husband and a father, will shew you that your present and most anxious hours of solitude are spent on trifles. The welfare of those who are very dear to us, whose only support, hope, and stay we are—this, to a generous mind, is another sort of more important object of care than any concerns whatever which centre merely in the individual. On the other hand, let no young, unmarried, rakehelly dog among you, make a song of his pretended liberty and freedom from care. If the relations we stand in to king, country, kindred, and friends, be any thing but the visionary fancies of dreaming metaphysicians; if religion, virtue, magnanimity, generosity, humanity and justice, be aught but empty sounds; then the man who may be said to live only for others, for the beloved, honourable female, whose tender faithful embrace endears life, and for the helpless little innocents who are to be the men and women, the worshippers of his God, the subjects of his king, and the support, nay the very vital existence of his COUNTRY, in the ensuing age;—compare such a man with any fellow whatever, who, whether he bustle and push in business among labourers, clerks, statesmen; or whether he roar and rant, and drink and sing in taverns—a fellow over whose grave no one will breathe a single heigh-ho, except from the cobweb-tie of what is called good fellowship—who has no view nor aim but what terminates in himself—if there be any gro-

velling earthborn wretch of our species, a renegado to common sense, who would fain believe that the noble creature man, is no better than a sort of fungus, generated out of nothing, nobody knows how, and soon dissipating in nothing, nobody knows where; such a stupid beast, such a crawling reptile, might balance the foregoing unexaggerated comparison, but no one else would have the patience.

Forgive me, my dear Sir, for this long silence. *To make you amends,* I shall send you soon, and more encouraging still, without any postage, one or two rhymes of my later manufacture. R. B.

[This truly noble letter is worth a couple of sermons on domestic morality: he who wrote it spoke from his own experience, and no one has talked more wisely on this momentous matter.—Ed.]

No. CXLIX.

TO Mr. McMURDO.

Ellisland, 19th June, 1789.

Sir,

A poet and a beggar are, in so many points of view alike, that one might take them for the same individual character under different designations; were it not that though, with a trifling poetic license, most poets may be styled beggars, yet the converse of the proposition does not hold that every beggar is a poet. In one particular, however, they remarkably agree; if you help either the one or the other to a mug of ale, or the picking of a bone, they will very willingly repay you with a song. This occurs to me at present, as I have just dispatched a well-lined rib of John Kirkpatrick's Highlander; a bargain for which I am indebted to you, in the style of our ballad printers, "Five excellent new songs." The enclosed is nearly my newest song, and one that has cost me some pains, though that is but an equivocal mark of its excellence. Two or three others, which I have by me, shall do themselves the honour to wait on your after leisure: petitioners for admittance into favour, must not harass the condescension of their benefactor.

You see, Sir, what it is to patronise a poet. 'Tis

like being a magistrate in a petty borough; you do them the favour to preside in their council for one year, and your name bears the prefatory stigma of Bailie for life.

With, not the compliments, but the best wishes, the sincerest prayers of the season for you, that you may see many and happy years with Mrs. McMurdo, and your family; two blessings by the bye, to which your rank does not, by any means, entitle you; a loving wife and fine family being almost the only good things of this life to which the farm-house and cottage have an exclusive right.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your much indebted and very humble servant,

R. B.

[Of John McMurdo, of Drumlanrig, I have already spoken: he was one of Burns' firmest Nithsdale friends, and was united with others, at the poet's death, in the management of his affairs, which prospered so well, that two hundred pounds per annum became the widow's portion for many years before she was laid in the grave. Burns was sensible of other charms at Drumlanrig than those of loveliness, wit, and a well-spread table: he admired the mansion, copied after the design of Inigo Jones—and more the winding Nith, which seems anxious at that place to become as picturesque as possible. The rushing river, the woody banks, the stately towers, and the lofty hills, all unite in rendering this one of the pleasantest spots in Upper Nithsdale.—Ed.]

No. CL.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 21st June 1789.

DEAR MADAM,

WILL you take the effusions, the miserable effusions of low spirits, just as they flow from their bitter spring? I know not of any particular cause for this worst of all my foes besetting me; but for some time my soul has been beclouded with a thickening atmosphere of evil imaginations and gloomy presages.

Monday Evening.

I have just heard Mr. Kirkpatrick preach a sermon. He is a man famous for his benevolence, and I revere him; but from such ideas of my Creator, good Lord, deliver me! Religion, my honoured friend, is surely a simple business, as it equally concerns the ignorant and the learned, the poor and the rich. That there is an incomprehensible Great Being, to whom I owe my existence, and that he must be intimately acquainted with the operations and progress of the internal machinery, and consequent outward deportment of this creature which he has made; these are, I think, self-evident propositions. That there is a real and eternal distinction between virtue and vice, and consequently, that I am an accountable creature; that from the seeming

nature of the human mind, as well as from the evident imperfection, nay, positive injustice, in the administration of affairs, both in the natural and moral world, there must be a retributive scene of existence beyond the grave; must, I think, be allowed by every one who will give himself a moment's reflection. I will go farther, and affirm, that from the sublimity, excellence, and purity of his doctrine and precepts, unparalleled by all the aggregated wisdom and learning of many preceding ages, though, *to appearance*, he himself was the obscurest and most illiterate of our species; therefore Jesus Christ was from God.

Whatever mitigates the woes, or increases the happiness of others, this is my criterion of goodness; and whatever injures society at large, or any individual in it, this is my measure of iniquity.

What think you, madam, of my creed? I trust that I have said nothing that will lessen me in the eye of one, whose good opinion I value almost next to the approbation of my own mind.

R. B.

[The Devil, the Pope, and the Pretender, darkened, for a century at least, in three-fold alliance the sermons of many a sound divine both in Scotland and England. The extinction of the house of Stuart lessened our dread of the Pope, and prepared, though no one acknowledged it, the nation for the healing and brotherly measure of Catholic emancipation. Other fears than such as arise from zeal in religion now molest the church.—ED.]

No. CLI.

TO Mr. ———.

1789.

My Dear Sir,

The hurry of a farmer in this particular season, and the indolence of a poet at all times and seasons, will, I hope, plead my excuse for neglecting so long to answer your obliging letter of the 5th of August.

That you have done well in quitting your laborious concern in **** I do not doubt; the weighty reasons you mention, were, I hope very, and deservedly indeed, weighty ones, and your health is a matter of the last importance; but whether the remaining proprietors of the paper have also done well, is what I much doubt. The ****, so far as I was a reader, exhibited such a brilliancy of point, such an elegance of paragraph, and such a variety of intelligence, that I can hardly conceive it possible to continue a daily paper in the same degree of excellence: but if there was a man who had abilities equal to the task, that man's assistance the proprietors have lost.

When I received your letter I was transcribing for * * * *, my letter to the magistrates of the Canongate, Edinburgh, begging their permission to

place a tomb-stone over poor Fergusson, and their edict in consequence of my petition, but now I shall send them to * * * * * * *. Poor Fergusson! If there be a life beyond the grave, which I trust there is: and if there be a good God presiding over all nature, which I am sure there is; thou art now enjoying existence in a glorious world, where worth of the heart alone is distinction in the man; where riches, deprived of all their pleasure-purchasing powers, return to their native sordid matter; where titles and honours are the disregarded reveries of an idle dream: and where that heavy virtue, which is the negative consequence of steady dulness, and those thoughtless, though often destructive follies, which are the unavoidable aberrations of frail human nature, will be thrown into equal oblivion as if they had never been!

Adieu, my dear Sir! So soon as your present views and schemes are concentred in an aim, I shall be glad to hear from you; as your welfare and happiness is by no means a subject indifferent to

Yours, R. B.

[The name of the gentleman to whom this letter is addressed has not transpired; this is the more to be lamented, since he seems to have wanted neither talent nor spirit, as his letter, to which that of Burns is an answer, will sufficiently shew:

"*London*, 5*th August*, 1789.

"My dear Sir,

"Excuse me when I say, that the uncommon abilities

which you possess, must render your correspondence very acceptable to any one. I can assure you, I am particularly proud of your partiality, and shall endeavour, by every method in my power, to merit a continuance of your politeness.

"When you can spare a few moments, I should be proud of a letter from you, directed for me, Gerrard-street, Soho.

"I cannot express my happiness sufficiently at the instance of your attachment to my late inestimable friend, Bob Fergusson, who was particularly intimate with myself and relations. While I recollect with pleasure his extraordinary talents, and many amiable qualities, it affords me the greatest consolation, that I am honoured with the correspondence of his successor in national simplicity and genius. That Mr. Burns has refined in the art of poetry, must readily be admitted; but, notwithstanding many favourable representations, I am yet to learn that he inherits his convivial powers.

"There was such a richness of conversation, such a plenitude of fancy and attraction in him, that when I call the happy period of our intercourse to my memory, I feel myself in a state of delirium. I was then younger than him by eight or ten years; but his manner was so felicitous, that he enraptured every person around him, and infused into the hearts of young and old the spirit which operated on his own mind."]

No. CLII.

TO MISS WILLIAMS.

Ellisland, 1789.

Madam,

Of the many problems in the nature of that wonderful creature, man, this is one of the most extraordinary, that he shall go on from day to day, from week to week, from month to month, or perhaps from year to year, suffering a hundred times more in an hour from the impotent conciousness of neglecting what he ought to do, than the very doing of it would cost him. I am deeply indebted to you, first for a most elegant poetic compliment; then for a polite, obliging letter: and, lastly, for your excellent poem on the Slave-Trade; and yet, wretch that I am! though the debts were debts of honour, and the creditor a lady, I have put off and put off even the very acknowledgment of the obligation, until you must indeed be the very angel I take you for, if you can forgive me.

Your poem I have read with the highest pleasure. I have a way whenever I read a book, I mean a book in our own trade, Madam, a poetic one,

and when it is my own property, that I take a pencil and mark at the ends of verses, or note on margins and odd paper, little criticisms of approbation or disapprobation as I peruse along. I will make no apology for presenting you with a few unconnected thoughts that occurred to me in my repeated perusals of your poem. I want to shew you that I have honesty enough to tell you what I take to be truths, even when they are not quite on the side of approbation; and I do it in the firm faith that you have equal greatness of mind to hear them with pleasure.

I had lately the honour of a letter from Dr. Moore, where he tells me that he has sent me some books: they are not yet come to hand, but I hear they are on the way.

Wishing you all success in your progress in the path of fame; and that you may equally escape the danger of stumbling through incautious speed, or losing ground through loitering neglect. R. B.

[The lady to whom this letter is addressed was the well known Helen Maria Williams—her answer is characteristic :—

"*7th August*, 1789.

"DEAR SIR,

"I DO not lose a moment in returning you my sincere acknowledgments for your letter, and your criticism on my poem, which is a very flattering proof that you have

read it with attention. I think your objections are perfectly just, except in one instance.

"You have indeed been very profuse of panegyric on my little performance. A much less portion of applause from *you*, would have been gratifying to me; since I think its value depends entirely upon the source from whence it proceeds—the incense of praise, like other incense, is more grateful from the quality, than the quantity of the odour.

"I hope you still cultivate the pleasures of poetry, which are precious even independent of the rewards of fame. Perhaps the most valuable property of poetry is its power of disengaging the mind from worldly cares, and leading the imagination to the richest springs of intellectual enjoyment; since, however frequently life may be chequered with gloomy scenes, those who truly love the Muse, can always find one little path adorned with flowers and cheered by sunshine."]

No. CLIII.

TO MR. JOHN LOGAN.

Ellisland, near Dumfries, 7th Aug. 1789.

DEAR SIR,

I INTENDED to have written you long ere now, and as I told you I had gotten three stanzas and a half on my way in a poetic epistle to you; but that old enemy of all *good works*, the devil, threw me into a prosaic mire, and for the soul of me I cannot get out of it. I dare not write you a long letter, as I am going to intrude on your time with a long ballad. I have, as you will shortly see, finished "The Kirk's Alarm;" but now that it is done, and that I have laughed once or twice at the conceits in some of the stanzas, I am determined not to let it get into the public; so I send you this copy, the first that I have sent to Ayrshire, except some few of the stanzas, which I wrote off in embryo for Gavin Hamilton, under the express provision and request that you will only read it to a few of us, and do not on any account give, or permit to be taken, any copy of the ballad. If I could be of any service to Dr. M'Gill, I would do it, though it should be at a much greater expense than irritating a few bigoted

priests, but I am afraid serving him in his present *embarras* is a task too hard for me. I have enemies enow, God knows, though I do not wantonly add to the number. Still as I think there is some merit in two or three of the thoughts, I send it to you as a small, but sincere testimony how much, and with what respectful esteem,

I am, dear Sir,
your obliged humble servant,
R. B.

[An error into which the biographers of Burns have fallen is corrected by this letter. The 'Kirk's Alarm' is neither an early production nor of western descent; it was composed at Ellisland with the hope of rendering some service to the Reverend Dr. M'Gill, against whom a cry of heresy had been raised—and not without reason. I have seen only two copies of this satire in the poet's handwriting: one is contained in the Afton MSS. and the other is in the collection of the daughter of the gentleman to whom this letter is addressed.—Ed.]

No. CLIV.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 6th Sept. 1789.

DEAR MADAM,

I HAVE mentioned in my last, my appointment to the Excise, and the birth of little Frank; who, by the bye, I trust will be no discredit to the honourable name of Wallace, as he has a fine manly countenance, and a figure that might do credit to a little fellow two months older; and likewise an excellent good temper, though when he pleases he has a pipe, only not quite so loud as the horn that his immortal namesake blew as a signal to take out the pin of Stirling bridge.

I had some time ago an epistle, part poetic, and part prosaic, from your poetess, Mrs. J. Little, a very ingenious, but modest composition. I should have written her as she requested, but for the hurry of this new business. I have heard of her and her compositions in this country; and I am happy to add, always to the honour of her character. The fact is, I know not well how to write to her: I should sit down to a sheet of paper that I knew

not how to stain. I am no dab at fine-drawn letter-writing; and, except when prompted by friendship or gratitude, or, which happens extremely rarely, inspired by the Muse (I know not her name) that presides over epistolary writing, I sit down, when necessitated to write, as I would sit down to beat hemp.

Some parts of your letter of the 20th August, struck me with the most melancholy concern for the state of your mind at present.

Would I could write you a letter of comfort, I would sit down to it with as much pleasure, as I would to write an epic poem of my own composition, that should equal the *Iliad*. Religion, my dear friend, is the true comfort! A strong persuasion in a future state of existence; a proposition so obviously probable, that, setting revelation aside, every nation and people, so far as investigation has reached, for at least near four thousand years, have, in some mode or other, firmly believed it. In vain would we reason and pretend to doubt. I have myself done so to a very daring pitch; but, when I reflected, that I was opposing the most ardent wishes, and the most darling hopes of good men, and flying in the face of all human belief, in all ages, I was shocked at my own conduct.

I know not whether I have ever sent you the following lines, or if you have ever seen them; but it is one of my favourite quotations, which I keep

constantly by me in my progress through life, in the language of the book of Job,*

"Against the day of battle and of war"—

spoken of religion:

"'Tis *this*, my friend, that streaks our morning bright
'Tis *this* that gilds the horror of our night.
When wealth forsakes us, and when friends are few
When friends are faithless, or when foes pursue;
'Tis this that wards the blow, or stills the smart,
Disarms affliction, or repels his dart,
Within the breast bids purest raptures rise,
Bids smiling conscience spread her cloudless skies."

I have been busy with *Zeluco*. The Doctor is so obliging as to request my opinion of it; and I have been revolving in my mind some kind of criticisms on novel-writing, but it is a depth beyond my research. I shall however digest my thoughts on the subject as well as I can. *Zeluco* is a most sterling performance.

Farewell! *A Dieu, le bon Dieu, je vous commende!*

R. B.

[The communication from Dr. Moore to which the poet's letter alludes contained the following advice—given I am glad to say in vain:—

"*Clifford Street*, 10*th June*, 1789.

"Dear Sir,

"If I were to offer an opinion, it would be, that in your future productions you should abandon the Scottish stanza and dialect, and adopt the measure and language of modern English poetry.

"The stanza which you use in imitation of *Christ Kirk on the Green*, with the tiresome repetition of 'that

day,' is fatiguing to English ears, and I should think not very agreeable to Scottish.

"All the fine satire and humour of your *Holy Fair* is lost on the English; yet, without more trouble to yourself, you could have conveyed the whole to them. The same is true of some of your other poems. In your *Epistle to James Smith*, the stanzas from that beginning with this line, 'This life, so far's I understand," to that which ends with, 'Short while it grieves,' are easy, flowing, gaily philosophical, and of Horatian elegance—the language is English, with a *few* Scottish words, and some of those so harmonious, as to add to the beauty; for what poet would not prefer *gloaming* to *twilight*.

"I imagine, that by carefully keeping, and occasionally polishing and correcting those verses, which the Muse dictates, you will, within a year or two, have another volume as large as the first, ready for the press; and this without diverting you from every proper attention to the study and practice of husbandry, in which I understand you are very learned, and which I fancy you will choose to adhere to as a wife, while poetry amuses you from time to time as a mistress. The former, like a prudent wife, must not shew ill humour, although you retain a sneaking kindness to this agreeable gipsey, and pay her occasional visits, which in no manner alienates your heart from your lawful spouse, but tends, on the contrary, to promote her interest."

The poetic Epistle from Miss Janet Little was ushered in by the following account of herself:—

"*Loudon House*, 12*th July*, 1789.

"SIR,

"THOUGH I have not the happiness of being personally acquainted with you, yet amongst the number of those who have read and admired your publications, may I

be permitted to trouble you with this. You must know, Sir, I am somewhat in love with the Muses, though I cannot boast of any favors they have deigned to confer upon me as yet; my situation in life has been very much against me as to that. I have spent some years in and about Ecclefechan, (where my parents reside) in the station of a servant, and am now come to Loudon House, at present possessed by Mrs. H——: she is daughter to Mrs. Dunlop, of Dunlop, whom I understand you are particularly acquainted with. As I had the pleasure of perusing your poems, I felt a partiality for the author, which I should not have experienced had you been in a more dignified station. I wrote a few verses of address to you, which I did not then think of ever presenting; but as fortune seems to have favored me in this, by bringing me into a family, by whom you are well known, and much esteemed, and where perhaps I may have an opportunity of seeing you; I shall, in hopes of your future friendship, take the liberty to transcribe them.

Fair fa' the honest rustic swain,
The pride o' a' our Scottish plain:
Thou gi'es us joy to hear thy strain,
And notes sae sweet:
Old Ramsay's shade reviv'd again
In thee we greet.

Lov'd Thalia, that delightfu' muse,
Seem'd lang shut up as a recluse;
To all she did her aid refuse,
Since Allan's day:
'Till Burns arose, then did she chuse
To grace his lay."

There are nine other verses—some worse, none better than these. The Milkmaid had little of the Ploughman's inspiration.—Ed.]

No. CLV.

TO CAPTAIN RIDDEL,

CARSE.

Ellisland, 16th Oct. 1789.

SIR,

Big with the idea of this important day at Friars Carse, I have watched the elements and skies in the full persuasion that they would announce it to the astonished world by some phenomena of terrific portent.—Yesternight until a very late hour did I wait with anxious horror, for the appearance of some Comet firing half the sky; or aerial armies of sanguinary Scandinavians, darting athwart the startled heavens, rapid as the ragged lightning, and horrid as those convulsions of nature that bury nations.

The elements, however, seem to take the matter very quietly: they did not even usher in this morning with triple suns and a shower of blood, symbolical of the three potent heroes, and the mighty claret-shed of the day.—For me, as Thomson in his Winter says of the storm—I shall "Hear astonished, and astonished sing"

The whistle and the man; I sing
The man that won the whistle, &c.

Here are we met, three merry boys,
Three merry boys I trow are we;
And mony a night we've merry been,
And mony mae we hope to be.

Wha first shall rise to gang awa,
A cuckold coward loun is he:
Wha *last* beside his chair shall fa'
He is the king amang us three.

To leave the heights of Parnassus and come to the humble vale of prose.—I have some misgivings that I take too much upon me, when I request you to get your guest, Sir Robert Lowrie, to frank the two enclosed covers for me, the one of them, to Sir William Cunningham, of Robertland, Bart. at Kilmarnock,—the other, to Mr. Allan Masterton, Writing-Master, Edinburgh. The first has a kindred claim on Sir Robert, as being a brother Baronet, and likewise a keen Foxite; the other is one of the worthiest men in the world, and a man of real genius; so, allow me to say, he has a fraternal claim on you. I want them franked for to-morrow, as I cannot get them to the post to-night.—I shall send a servant again for them in the evening. Wishing that your head may be crowned with laurels to-night, and free from aches to-morrow,

I have the honor to be, Sir,
Your deeply indebted humble Servant,

R. B.

[The bard seems to have prepared himself for celebrating a contest which did not take place for a year afterwards. The whistle was contended for 16th Oct. 1790: the successful competitor, Fergusson, of Craigdarroch, was killed by a fall from his horse, many years after this jovial contest; he excelled in ready eloquence, and loved witty company.—Ed.]

No. CLVI.

TO CAPTAIN RIDDEL.

Ellisland, 1789.

SIR,

I WISH from my inmost soul it were in my power to give you a more substantial gratification and return for all the goodness to the poet, than transscribing a few of his idle rhymes.—However, " an old song," though to a proverb an instance of insignificance, is generally the only coin a poet has to pay with.

If my poems which I have transcribed, and mean still to transcribe into your book, were equal to the grateful respect and high esteem I bear for the gentleman to whom I present them, they would be the finest poems in the language.—As they are, they will at least be a testimony with what sincerity I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your devoted humble Servant,

R. B.

No. CLVII.

TO MR. ROBERT AINSLIE.

Ellisland, 1*st Nov*. 1789.

My Dear Friend,

I had written you long ere now, could I have guessed where to find you, for I am sure you have more good sense than to waste the precious days of vacation time in the dirt of business and Edinburgh.—Wherever you are, God bless you, and lead you not into temptation, but deliver you from evil!

I do not know if I have informed you that I am now appointed to an excise division, in the middle of which my house and farm lie. In this I was extremely lucky. Without ever having been an expectant, as they call their journeymen excisemen, I was directly planted down to all intents and purposes an officer of excise; there to flourish and bring forth fruits—worthy of repentance.

I know not how the word exciseman, or still more opprobrious, gauger, will sound in your ears. I too have seen the day when my auditory nerves would have felt very delicately on this subject; but a wife and children are things which have a wonderful power in blunting these kind of sensations. Fifty pounds a year for life, and a provision for widows and orphans, you will allow is no bad settlement for a *poet*. For the ignominy of the profession, I have the encouragement which I once heard a recruiting sergeant give to a numerous, if

not a respectable audience, in the streets of Kilmarnock.—"Gentlemen, for your further and better encouragement, I can assure you that our regiment is the most blackguard corps under the crown, and consequently with us an honest fellow has the surest chance for preferment."

You need not doubt that I find several very unpleasant and disagreeable circumstances in my business; but I am tired with and disgusted at the language of complaint against the evils of life. Human existence in the most favourable situations does not abound with pleasures, and has its inconveniences and ills; capricious foolish man mistakes these inconveniences and ills as if they were the peculiar property of his particular situation; and hence that eternal fickleness, that love of change, which has ruined, and daily does ruin many a fine fellow, as well as many a blockhead, and is almost, without exception, a constant source of disappointment and misery.

I long to hear from you how you go on—not so much in business as in life. Are you pretty well satisfied with your own exertions, and tolerably at ease in your internal reflections? 'Tis much to be a great character as a lawyer, but beyond comparison more to be a great character as a man. That you may be both the one and the other is the earnest wish, and that you *will* be both is the firm persuasion of,

My dear, Sir, &c. R. B.

No. CLVIII.

TO Mr. RICHARD BROWN.

Ellisland, 4th November, 1789.

I have been so hurried, my ever dear friend, that though I got both your letters, I have not been able to command an hour to answer them as I wished; and even now, you are to look on this as merely confessing debt, and craving days. Few things could have given me so much pleasure as the news that you were once more safe and sound on terra firma, and happy in that place where happiness is alone to be found, in the fireside circle. May the benevolent Director of all things peculiarly bless you in all those endearing connections consequent on the tender and venerable names of husband and father! I have indeed been extremely lucky in getting an additional income of £50 a year, while, at the same time, the appointment will not cost me above £10 or £12 per annum of expences more than I must have inevitably incurred. The worst circumstance is, that the excise division which I have got is so extensive, no less than ten parishes to ride over; and it abounds besides with so much business, that I can scarcely steal a spare moment.

However, labour endears rest, and both together are absolutely necessary for the proper enjoyment of human existence. I cannot meet you any where. No less than an order from the Board of Excise, at Edinburgh, is necessary before I can have so much time as to meet you in Ayrshire. But do you come, and see me. We must have a social day, and perhaps lengthen it out with half the night, before you go again to sea. You are the earliest friend I now have on earth, my brothers excepted; and is not that an endearing circumstance? When you and I first met, we were at the green period of human life. The twig would easily take a bent, but would as easily return to its former state. You and I not only took a mutual bent, but, by the melancholy, though strong influence of being both of the family of the unfortunate, we were entwined with one another in our growth towards advanced age; and blasted be the sacrilegious hand that shall attempt to undo the union! You and I must have one bumper to my favourite toast, "May the companions of our youth be the friends of our old age!" Come and see me one year; I shall see you at Port Glasgow the next, and if we can contrive to have a gossiping between our two bed-fellows, it will be so much additional pleasure. Mrs. Burns joins me in kind compliments to you and Mrs. Brown. Adieu!

I am ever, my dear Sir, yours,

R. B.

No. CLIX.

TO R. GRAHAM, ESQ.

OF FINTRAY.

9th December, 1789

SIR,

I HAVE a good while had a wish to trouble you with a letter, and had certainly done it long ere now —but for a humiliating something that throws cold water on the resolution, as if one should say, "You have found Mr. Graham a very powerful and kind friend indeed, and that interest he is so kindly taking in your concerns, you ought by every thing in your power to keep alive and cherish." Now though since God has thought proper to make one powerful and another helpless, the connection of obliger and obliged is all fair; and though my being under your patronage is to me highly honourable, yet, Sir, allow me to flatter myself, that, as a poet and an honest man you first interested yourself in my welfare, and principally as such, still you permit me to approach you.

I have found the excise business go on a great deal smoother with me than I expected; owing a good deal to the generous friendship of Mr. Mit-

chel, my collector, and the kind assistance of Mr. Findlater, my supervisor. I dare to be honest, and I fear no labour. Nor do I find my hurried life greatly inimical to my correspondence with the Muses. Their visits to me, indeed, and I believe to most of their acquaintance, like the visits of good angels, are short and far between: but I meet them now and then as I jog through the hills of Nithsdale, just as I used to do on the banks of Ayr. I take the liberty to inclose you a few bagatelles, all of them the productions of my leisure thoughts in my excise rides.

If you know or have ever seen Captain Grose, the antiquarian, you will enter into any humour that is in the verses on him. Perhaps you have seen them before, as I sent them to a London Newspaper. Though I dare say you have none of the solemn-league-and-covenant fire, which shone so conspicuous in Lord George Gordon, and the Kilmarnock weavers, yet I think you must have heard of Dr. McGill, one of the clergymen of Ayr, and his heretical book. God help him, poor man! Though he is one of the worthiest, as well as one of the ablest of the whole priesthood of the Kirk of Scotland, in every sense of that ambiguous term, yet the poor Doctor and his numerous family are in imminent danger of being thrown out to the mercy of the winter-winds. The inclosed ballad on that business is, I confess, too local, but I laughed myself at some conceits in it, though I am convinced in my con-

science that there are a good many heavy stanzas in it too.

The election ballad, as you will see, alludes to the present canvass in our string of boroughs. I do not believe there will be such a hard run match in the whole general election.

I am too little a man to have any political attachments; I am deeply indebted to, and have the warmest veneration for, individuals of both parties; but a man who has it in his power to be the father of a country, and who * * * * *, is a character that one cannot speak of with patience.

Sir J. J. does "what man can do," but yet I doubt his fate.

[In this letter, besides the verses on Grose, the poet enclosed the Kirk's Alarm, and the first ballad on Miller's election. His heart seems to have been with Johnstone in the latter affair; he cordially disliked the Duke of Queensbury, a nobleman who herried the land which he ought to have enriched, and squandered his rents among

"Pimps, sharpers, bawds, and opera girls."

Captain Miller, the candidate in the Queensbury interest and son of the poet's landlord, was a Whig—yet this seems not to have overcome Burns's aversion to old Q. a name under which the caricaturists of London loved to lampoon the person of his Grace.—Ed.]

No. CLX.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 13th December, 1789.

Many thanks, dear Madam, for your sheet-full of rhymes. Though at present I am below the veriest prose, yet from you every thing pleases. I am groaning under the miseries of a diseased nervous system; a system, the state of which is most conducive to our happiness—or the most productive of our misery. For now near three weeks I have been so ill with a nervous head-ache, that I have been obliged for a time to give up my excise-books, being scarce able to lift my head, much less to ride once a week over ten muir parishes. What is man?—To day, in the luxuriance of health, exulting in the enjoyment of existence; in a few days, perhaps in a few hours, loaded with conscious painful being, counting the tardy pace of the lingering moments by the repercussions of anguish, and refusing or denied a comforter. Day follows night, and night comes after day, only to curse him with life which gives him

no pleasure; and yet the awful, dark termination of that life, is something at which he recoils.

> "Tell us, ye dead; will none of you in pity
> Disclose the secret——————
> *What 'tis you are, and we must sh[illegible] be?*
> —'tis no ma[illegible]
> A little time will make us learn'd as you [illegible]

Can it be possible, that when I resign this frail, feverish being, I shall still find myself in conscious existence? When the last gasp of agony has announced that I am no more to those that knew me, and the few who loved me; when the cold, stiffened, unconscious, ghastly corse is resigned into the earth, to be the prey of [illegible]sightly reptiles, and to become in time a trodden clod, shall I be yet warm in life, seeing and seen, enjoying and enjoyed? Ye venerable sages, and holy flamens, is there probability in your conjectures, truth in your stories, of another world beyond death; or are they all alike, baseless visions, and fabricated fables? If there is another life, it must be only for the just, the benevolent, the amiable, and the humane; what a flattering idea, then, is a world to come! Would to God I as firmly believed it, as I ardently wish it! There I should meet an aged parent, now at rest from the many buffetings of an evil world, against which he so long and so bravely struggled. There should [illegible] the friend, the disinterested friend of my early life; the man who rejoiced to see me, because he loved me and could serve me.—Muir, thy weaknesses were the aberrations of human nature, but thy heart glowed with every thing generous,

manly, and noble; and if ever emanation from the All-good Being animated a human form, it was thine!—There should I, with speechless agony of rapture, again recognize my lost, my ever dear Mary! whose bosom was fraught with truth, honour, constancy, and love.

> "My Mary, dear departed shade!
> Where is thy place of heavenly rest?
> Seest thou thy lover lowly laid?
> Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast?"

Jesus Christ, thou amiablest of characters! I trust thou art no impostor, and that thy revelation of blissful scenes of existence beyond death and the grave, is not one of the many impositions which time after time have been palmed on credulous mankind. I trust that in thee "shall all the families of the earth be blessed," by being yet connected together in a better world, where every tie that bound heart to heart, in this state of existence, shall be, far beyond our present conceptions, more endearing.

I am a good deal inclined to think with those who maintain, that what are called nervous affections are in fact diseases of the mind. I cannot reason, I cannot think; and but to you I would not venture to write any thing above an order to a cobbler. You have felt too much of the ills of life not to sympathise with a diseased wretch, who has impaired more than half of any faculties he possessed. Your goodness will excuse this distracted scrawl, which the

writer dare scarcely read, and which he would throw into the fire, were he able to write any thing better, or indeed any thing at all.

Rumour told me something of a son of yours, who was returned from the East or West Indies. If you have gotten news from James or Anthony, it was cruel in you not to let me know; as I promise you, on the sincerity of a man, who is weary of one world, and anxious about another, that scarce any thing could give me so much pleasure as to hear of any good thing befalling my honoured friend.

If you have a minute's leisure, take up your pen in pity to *le pauvre miserable.* R. B.

[Muir, so touchingly alluded to in this letter, was one of the poet's earliest and least assuming friends—he was mild and benevolent, and did deeds of kindness without seeming to do them.—Ed.

No. CLXI.

TO SIR JOHN SINCLAIR.

1790.

SIR,

THE following circumstance has, I believe, been omitted in the statistical account, transmitted to you, of the parish of Dunscore, in Nithsdale. I beg leave to send it to you, because it is new, and may be useful. How far [illegible] deserving of a place in your patriotic publication, you are the best judge.

To store the minds of the lower classes with useful knowledge, is certainly of very great importance, both to them as individuals, and to society at large. Giving them a turn for reading and reflection, is giving them a source of innocent and laudable amusement; and besides, raises them to a more dignified degree in the scale of rationality. Impressed with this idea, a gentleman in this parish, Robert Riddel, Esq. of Glenriddel, set on foot a species of circulating library, on a plan so simple as to be practicable in any corner of the country; and so useful, as to deserve the notice of [illegible] country gentleman, who thinks the improveme[illegible] that part of his own species, whom chance has thrown into the humble walks of the peasant and the artizan, a matter worthy of his attention.

Mr. Riddel got a number of his own tenants, and farming neighbours, to form themselves into a society for the purpose of having a library among themselves. They entered into a legal engagement to abide by it for three years; with a saving clause or two, in case of a removal to a distance, or death. Each member, at his entry, paid five shillings; and at each of their meetings, which were held every fourth Saturday, sixpence more. With their entry-money, and the credit which they took on the faith of their future funds, they laid in a tolerable stock of books at the commencement. What authors they were to purchase, was always decided by the majority. At every meeting, all the books, under certain fines and forfeitures, by way of penalty, were to be produced; and the members had their choice of the volumes in rotation. He whose name stood for that night, first on the list, had his choice of what volume he pleased in the whole collection; the second had his choice after the first; the third after the second, and so on to the last. At next meeting, he who had been first on the list at the preceding meeting, was last at this; he who had been second was first; and so on through the whole three years. At the expiration of the engagement, the books were sold by auction, but only among the members themselves; each man had his share of the common stock, in money or in books, as he chose to be a purchaser or not.

At the breaking up of this little society, which was

formed under Mr. Riddel's patronage, what with benefactions of books from him, and what with their own purchases, they had collected together upwards of one hundred and fifty volumes. It will easily be guessed that a good deal of trash would be bought. Among the books, however of this little library, were, *Blair's Sermons, Robertson's History of Scotland, Hume's History of the Stewarts, The Spectator, Idler, Adventurer, Mirror, Lounger, Observer, Man of Feeling, Man of the World, Chrysal, Don Quixote, Joseph Andrews*, &c. A peasant who can read, and enjoy such books, is certainly a much superior being to his neighbour, who perhaps stalks beside his team, very little removed, except in shape, from the brutes he drives.

Wishing your patriotic exertions their so much merited success,

I am, Sir,

your humble servant,

A PEASANT.

[The above is extracted from the third volume of Sir John Sinclair's Statistics, p. 598.—It was inclosed to Sir John by Mr. Riddel himself in the following letter, also printed there:

SIR JOHN,

"I enclose you a letter, written by Mr. Burns, as an addition to the account of Dunscore parish. It contains an account of a small library which he was so good

(at my desire) as to set on foot, in the barony of Monkland, or Friar's Carse, in this parish. As its utility has been felt, particularly among the younger class of people, I think, that if a similar plan were established in the different parishes of Scotland, it would tend greatly to the speedy improvement of the tenantry, trades-people, and work-people. Mr. Burns was so good as to take the whole charge of this small concern. He was treasurer, librarian, and censor, to this little society, who will long have a grateful sense of his public spirit and exertions for their improvement and information.

I have the honour to be, Sir John,

Your's most sincerely,

ROBERT RIDDEL.

How the pious Kirkpatrick happened to omit all reference to the Monkland Book Club in his account of Dunscore, is easily explained. He was a rigid and austere Calvinist: the books which the poet introduced he reckoned frivolous and vain; neither did Blair's Sermons, nor Robertson's History, soothe him—they were the works of children of the New Light!—ED.]

No. CLXII.

TO CHARLES SHARPE, Esq.

OF HODDAM,

Under a fictitious Signature, enclosing a Ballad,
1790 *or* 1791.

It is true, Sir, you are a gentleman of rank and fortune, and I am a poor devil: you are a feather in the cap of society, and I am a very hobnail in his shoes; yet I have the honour to belong to the same family with you, and on that score I now address you. You will perhaps suspect that I am going to claim affinity with the ancient and honourable house of Kirkpatrick: No, no, Sir: I cannot indeed be properly said to belong to any house, or even any province or kingdom; as my mother, who for many years was spouse to a marching regiment, gave me into this bad world, aboard the packet-boat, somewhere between Donaghadee and Port-patrick. By our common family, I mean, Sir, the family of the Muses. I am a fiddler and a poet; and you, I am told, play an exquisite violin, and have a standard taste in the Belles Lettres. The

other day, a brother catgut gave me a charming Scots air of your composition. If I was pleased with the tune, I was in raptures with the title you have given it; and taking up the idea, I have spun it into the three stanzas enclosed. Will you allow me, Sir, to present you them, as the dearest offering that a misbegotten son of poverty and rhyme has to give? I have a longing to take you by the hand and unburthen my heart by saying, "Sir, honour you as a man who supports the dignity of human nature, amid an age when frivolity and avarice have, between them, debased us below the brutes that perish!" But, alas! Sir! to me you are unapproachable. It is true, the Muses baptized me in Castalian streams, but the thoughtless gipsies forgot to give me a name. As the sex have served many a good fellow, the Nine have given me a great deal of pleasure, but, bewitching jades! they have beggared me. Would they but spare me a little of their cast-linen! Were it only in my power to say, that I have a shirt on my back! But the idle wenches, like Solomon's lilies, "they toil not, neither do they spin;" so I must e'en continue to tie my remnant of a cravat, like the hangman's rope, round my naked throat, and coax my galligaskins to keep together their many-coloured fragments. As to the affair of shoes, I have given that up. My pilgrimages in my ballad-trade, from town to town, and on your stony-hearted turnpikes too, are what

not even the hide of Job's Behemoth could bear. The coat on my back is no more: I shall not speak evil of the dead. It would be equally unhandsome and ungrateful to find fault with my old surtout, which so kindly supplies and conceals the want of that coat. My hat indeed is a great favourite; and though I got it literally for an old song, I would not exchange it for the best beaver in Britain. I was, during several years, a kind of fac-totum servant to a country clergyman, where I pickt up a good many scraps of learning, particularly in some branches of the mathematics. Whenever I feel inclined to rest myself on my way, I take my seat under a hedge, laying my poetic wallet on the one side, and my fiddle-case on the other, and placing my hat between my legs, I can by means of its brim, or rather brims, go through the whole doctrine of the Conic Sections.

However, Sir, don't let me mislead you, as if I would interest your pity. Fortune has so much forsaken me, that she has taught me to live without her; and amid all my rags and poverty, I am as independent, and much more happy, than a monarch of the world. According to the hackneyed metaphor, I value the several actors in the great drama of life, simply as they act their parts. I can look on a worthless fellow of a duke with unqualified contempt, and can regard an honest scavenger with sincere respect. As you, Sir, go through your rôle

with such distinguished merit, permit me to make one in the chorus of universal applause, and assure you that with the highest respect,

I have the honour to be, &c.

[The family of Hoddam is one of old standing in the county of Dumfries: it has mingled blood with some of the noblest names in the south of Scotland, and is at present worthily represented by General Sharpe, Member of Parliament for the five boroughs. Nor is the name known through that alone: my friend Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe is distinguished by his scholarship and genius, by his critical knowledge both in literature and art, and by a wit terse and keen. The poet in his humourous letter seriously alludes to the connection between his correspondent and the Knight of Closeburn—and what was still more welcome perhaps, congratulates him on his being able to reckon kin with the Muses. Charles Sharpe of Hoddam had not only fine taste in musical composition, but wrote verses with a happiness which justified, I am told, the commendations of Burns.—Ed.]

No. CLXIII.

TO MR. GILBERT BURNS.

Ellisland, 11th January, 1790.

DEAR BROTHER,

I MEAN to take advantage of the frank, though I have not in my present frame of mind much appetite for exertion in writing. My nerves are in a cursed state. I feel that horrid hypochondria pervading every atom of both body and soul. This farm has undone my enjoyment of myself. It is a ruinous affair on all hands. But let it go to hell! I'll fight it out and be off with it.

We have gotten a set of very decent players here just now. I have seen them an evening or two. David Campbell, in Ayr, wrote to me by the manager of the company, a Mr. Sutherland, who is a man of apparent worth. On New-year-day evening I gave him the following prologue, which he spouted to his audience with applause.

No song nor dance I bring from yon great city,
That queens it o'er our taste—the more's the pity:
Tho' by the bye, abroad why will you roam?
Good sense and taste are natives here at home.

(*Vide vol.* iii. *p.* 115.)

I can no more.—If once I was clear of this cursed farm, I should respire more at ease.

R. B.

["The best laid schemes of mice and men," says the bard, "gang aft agley," and surely no speculation in which Burns ever engaged promised more comfort to his bosom, and abundance to his board, than did the leasing of Ellisland. Yet the farm was undoubtedly too high rented during the period of his occupation, and he probably had not the skill or the patience to enable him to cultivate ground with the peculiar nature of which he was unacquainted. Soon after he forsook it, the half of Ellisland was let to a neighbouring farmer for the same rent which the poet gave for the whole; but then it must be remembered that the prospect of hostilities with France had raised the price of grain and the value of ground. Land which let with difficulty at ten shillings an acre in 1788, was leased with ease at three pounds in the course of a few years.—Ed.]

No. CLXIV.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 25th January, 1790.

It has been owing to unremitting hurry of business that I have not written to you, Madam, long ere now. My health is greatly better, and I now begin once more to share in satisfaction and enjoyment with the rest of my fellow-creatures.

Many thanks, my much esteemed friend, for your kind letters; but why will you make me run the risk of being contemptible and mercenary in my own eyes? When I pique myself on my independent spirit, I hope it is neither poetic licence, nor poetic rant; and I am so flattered with the honour you have done me, in making me your compeer in friendship and friendly correspondence, that I cannot without pain, and a degree of mortification, be reminded of the real inequality between our situations.

Most sincerely do I rejoice with you, dear Madam, in the good news of Anthony. Not only your anxiety about his fate, but my own esteem for such a noble, warm-hearted, manly young fellow, in the

little I had of his acquaintance, has interested me deeply in his fortunes.

Falconer, the unfortunate author of the "Shipwreck," which you so much admire, is no more. After witnessing the dreadful catastrophe he so feelingly describes in his poem, and after weathering many hard gales of fortune, he went to the bottom with the Aurora frigate!

I forget what part of Scotland had the honour of giving him birth; but he was the son of obscurity and misfortune. He was one of those daring adventurous spirits, which Scotland, beyond any other country, is remarkable for producing. Little does the fond mother think, as she hangs delighted over the sweet little leech at her bosom, where the poor fellow may hereafter wander, and what may be his fate. I remember a stanza in an old Scottish ballad, which, notwithstanding its rude simplicity, speaks feelingly to the heart:

"Little did my mother think,
That day she cradled me,
What land I was to travel in,
Or what death I should die!"

Old Scottish songs are, you know, a favourite study and pursuit of mine, and now I am on that subject, allow me to give you two stanzas of another old simple ballad, which I am sure will please you. The catastrophe of the piece is a poor ruined female, lamenting her fate. She concludes with this pathetic wish:

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O that my father had ne'er on me smil'd;
  O that my mother had ne'er to me sung!
O that my cradle had never been rock'd;
  But that I had died when I was young!

O that the grave it were my bed;
  My blankets were my winding sheet;
The clocks and the worms my bedfellows a';
  And O sad sound as I should sleep!"

I do not remember in all my reading, to have met with any thing more truly the language of misery, than the exclamation in the last line. Misery is like love; to speak its language truly, the author must have felt it.

I am every day expecting the doctor to give your little godson* the small-pox. They are *rife* in the country, and I tremble for his fate. By the way, I cannot help congratulating you on his looks and spirit. Every person who sees him, acknowledges him to be the finest, handsomest child he has ever seen. I am myself delighted with the manly swell of his little chest, and a certain miniature dignity in the carriage of his head, and the glance of his fine black eye, which promise the undaunted gallantry of an independent mind.

I thought to have sent you some rhymes, but time forbids. I promise you poetry until you are tired of it, next time I have the honour of assuring you how truly I am, &c.

R. B.

* The bard's second son, Francis.

["Falconer," says Currie, "was in early life a sea-boy, on board a man of war, in which capacity he attracted the notice of Campbell, the author of the satire on Dr. Johnson, entitled 'Lexiphanes,' then purser of the ship. Campbell took him as his servant, and delighted in giving him instruction; and when Falconer afterwards acquired celebrity, boasted of him as his scholar. The Editor had this information from a surgeon of a man of war, in 1777, who knew both Campbell and Falconer, and who himself perished soon after by shipwreck, on the coast of America."

Currie seems to have been imperfectly acquainted with the chequered life and fortunes of Falconer. His parentage was humble, but his education was above the common: he displayed his poetic talents at an early age in a poem published in 1751, in memory of Frederick Prince of Wales: the Shipwreck, by which his name will be known to posterity, appeared 1762, and obtained for him the notice of the Duke of York. His Marine Dictionary, printed in 1769, introduced his name to many on whom the pathos of his poetry was lost: nor should it be forgotten, that before he sailed on his last fatal expedition, he wrote a poem called the Demagogue, in which he satirized with skill, as well as bitterness, one of the profligate patriots of the day.—Ed.]

No. CLXV.

TO MR. PETER HILL,

BOOKSELLER, EDINBURGH.

Ellisland, 2nd Feb. 1790.

No! I will not say one word about apologies or excuses for not writing—I am a poor, rascally gauger, condemned to gallop at least 200 miles every week to inspect dirty ponds and yeasty barrels, and where can I find time to write to, or importance to interest any body? the upbraidings of my conscience, nay the upbraidings of my wife, have persecuted me on your account these two or three months past.—I wish to God I was a great man, that my correspondence might throw light upon you, to let the world see what you really are: and then I would make your fortune, without putting my hand in my pocket for you, which, like all other great men, I suppose I would avoid as much as possible. What are you doing, and how are you doing? Have you lately seen any of my few friends? What has become of the BOROUGH REFORM, or how is the fate of my poor namesake Mademoiselle Burns decided? O man! but for thee and thy selfish appetites, and dishonest artifices, that beauteous form, and that once innocent and still ingenuous mind, which shone conspicuous and lovely in the faithful wife, and the

affectionate mother; and shall the unfortunate sacrifice to thy pleasures have no claim on thy humanity!

I saw lately in a Review, some extracts from a new poem, called the Village Curate; send it me. I want likewise a cheap copy of The World. Mr. Armstrong, the young poet, who does me the honour to mention me so kindly in his works, please give him my best thanks for the copy of his book— I shall write him, my first leisure hour. I like his poetry much, but I think his style in prose quite astonishing.

Your book came safe, and I am going to trouble you with farther commissions. I call it troubling you—because I want only, BOOKS; the cheapest way, the best; so you may have to hunt for them in the evening auctions. I want Smollett's Works, for the sake of his incomparable humour. I have already Roderick Random, and Humphrey Clinker.—Peregrine Pickle, Launcelot Greaves, and Ferdinand, Count Fathom, I still want; but as I said, the veriest ordinary copies will serve me. I am nice only in the appearance of my poets. I forget the price of Cowper's Poems, but, I believe, I must have them. I saw the other day, proposals for a publication, entitled, "Banks's new and complete Christian's Family Bible," printed for C. Cooke, Paternoster-row, London.—He promises at least, to give in the work, I think it is three hundred and odd engravings, to which he has put the names of the first

artists in London.—You will know the character of the performance, as some numbers of it are published; and if it is really what it pretends to be, set me down as a subscriber, and send me the published numbers.

Let me hear from you, your first leisure minute, and trust me you shall in future have no reason to complain of my silence. The dazzling perplexity of novelty will dissipate and leave me to pursue my course in the quiet path of methodical routine.

R. B.

[Perhaps no set of men more effectually avail themselves of the easy credulity of the public, than a certain description of Paternoster-row booksellers. Three hundred and odd engravings!—and by the first artists in London, too!—no wonder that Burns was dazzled by the splendour of the promise. It is no unusual thing for this class of impostors to illustrate the Holy Scriptures by plates originally engraved for the History of England, and I have actually seen subjects designed by our celebrated artist Stothard, from Clarissa Harlowe and the Novelist's Magazine, converted, with incredible dexterity, by these Bookselling-Breslaws, into Scriptural embellishments! One of these venders of 'Family Bibles' lately called on me, to consult me professionally about a folio engraving he brought with him.—It represented Mons. Buffon, seated, contemplating various groups of animals that surrounded him: he merely wished, he said, to be informed, whether by unclothing the Naturalist, and giving him a rather more resolute look, the plate could not, at a trifling expense, be made to pass for "Daniel in the Lion's Den!" CROMEK.]

No. CLXVI.

TO Mr. W. NICOL.

Ellisland, Feb. 9, 1790.

My Dear Sir,

That d-mned mare of yours is dead. I would freely have given her price to have saved her; she has vexed me beyond description. Indebted as I was to your goodness beyond what I can ever repay, I eagerly grasped at your offer to have the mare with me. That I might at least shew my readiness in wishing to be grateful, I took every care of her in my power. She was never crossed for riding above half a score of times by me or in my keeping. I drew her in the plough, one of three, for one poor week. I refused fifty-five shillings for her, which was the highest bode I could squeeze for her. I fed her up and had her in fine order for Dumfries fair; when four or five days before the fair, she was seized with an unaccountable disorder in the sinews, or somewhere in the bones of the neck; with a weakness or total want of power in her fillets, and in

short the whole vertebræ of her spine seemed to be diseased and unhinged, and in eight and forty hours, in spite of the two best farriers in the country, she died and be d-mned to her! The farriers said that she had been quite strained in the fillets beyond cure before you had bought her; and that the poor devil, though she might keep a little flesh, had been jaded and quite worn out with fatigue and oppression. While she was with me, she was under my own eye, and I assure you, my much valued friend, every thing was done for her that could be done; and the accident has vexed me to the heart. In fact I could not pluck up spirits to write to you, on account of the unfortunate business.

There is little new in this country. Our theatrical company, of which you must have heard, leave us this week. Their merit and character are indeed very great, both on the stage and in private life; not a worthless creature among them; and their encouragement has been accordingly. Their usual run is from eighteen to twenty-five pounds a night: seldom less than the one, and the house will hold no more than the other. There have been repeated instances of sending away six, and eight, and ten pounds a night for want of room. A new theatre is to be built by subscription; the first stone is to be laid on Friday first to come. Three hundred guineas have been raised by thirty subscribers, and thirty more might have been got if wanted. The manager, Mr. Sutherland, was introduced to me by a friend

from Ayr; and a worthier or cleverer fellow I have rarely met with. Some of our clergy have slipt in by stealth now and then; but they have got up a farce of their own. You must have heard how the Rev. Mr. Lawson of Kirkmahoe, seconded by the Rev. Mr. Kirkpatrick of Dunscore, and the rest of that faction, have accused in formal process, the unfortunate and Rev. Mr. Heron of Kirkgunzeon, that in ordaining Mr. Nielson to the cure of souls in Kirkbean, he, the said Heron, feloniously and treasonably bound the said Nielson to the confession of faith, *so far as it was agreeable to reason and the word of God!*

Mrs. B. begs to be remembered most gratefully to you. Little Bobby and Frank are charmingly well and healthy. I am jaded to death with fatigue. For these two or three months, on an average, I have not ridden less than two hundred miles per week. I have done little in the poetic way. I have given Mr. Sutherland two Prologues; one of which was delivered last week. I have likewise strung four or five barbarous stanzas, to the tune of Chevy Chase, by way of Elegy on your poor unfortunate mare, beginning (the name she got here was Peg Nicholson)

"Peg Nicholson was a good bay mare,
As ever trod on airn;
But now she's floating down the Nith,
And past the mouth o'Cairn."

[See vol. iii. page 138.]

My best compliments to Mrs. Nicol, and little

Neddy, and all the family; I hope Ned is a good scholar, and will come out to gather nuts and apples with the next harvest. R. B.

[The nuts which the poet promised the son of his friend might be gathered on every burn-bank in the vale of Nith: not so the apples; a few might be seen in private gardens, and gentlemen's orchards, but they were not to be found giving beauty to the hedge-rows, and fragrance to the public road, as in the sunnier regions of the south. The ancient golden pippin, and the true honey-pear, were plentiful in the old orchard of the house of Comyn, at Dalswinton, but the garden of Ellisland, during the superintendance of the poet produced only green kale and gooseberries—it is otherwise now. Ed.]

No. CLXVII.

TO MR. CUNNINGHAM.

Ellisland, 13th February, 1790.

I BEG your pardon, my dear and much valued friend, for writing to you on this very unfashionable, unsightly sheet—

"My poverty but not my will consents."

But to make amends, since of modish post I have none, except one poor widowed half-sheet of gilt, which lies in my drawer among my plebeian fool's-cap pages, like the widow of a man of fashion, whom that unpolite scoundrel, Necessity, has driven from Burgundy and Pineapple, to a dish of Bohea, with the scandal-bearing help-mate of a village-priest; or a glass of whisky-toddy, with a ruby-nosed yoke-fellow of a foot-padding exciseman—I make a vow to inclose this sheet-full of epistolary fragments in that my only scrap of gilt paper.

I am indeed your unworthy debtor for three friendly letters. I ought to have written to you long ere now, but it is a literal fact, I have scarcely a spare moment. It is not that I *will not* write to you; Miss Burnet is not more dear to her guardian

angel, nor his grace the Duke of Queensbury to the powers of darkness, than my friend Cunningham to him. It is not that I *cannot* write to you; should you doubt it, take the following fragment, which was intended for you some time ago, and be convinced that I can *antithesize* sentiment, and *circumvolute* periods, as well as any coiner of phrase in the regions of philology.

December, 1789.

MY DEAR CUNNINGHAM,

WHERE are you? And what are you doing? Can you be that son of levity, who takes up a friendship as he takes up a fashion; or are you, like some other of the worthiest fellows in the world, the victim of indolence, laden with fetters of ever-increasing weight?

What strange beings we are! Since we have a portion of conscious existence, equally capable of enjoying pleasure, happiness, and rapture, or of suffering pain, wretchedness, and misery, it is surely worthy of an inquiry, whether there be not such a thing as a science of life; whether method, economy, and fertility of expedients, be not applicable to enjoyment; and whether there be not a want of dexterity in pleasure, which renders our little scantling of happiness still less; and a profuseness, an intoxication in bliss, which leads to satiety, disgust, and self-abhorrence. There is not a doubt but that

health, talents, character, decent competency, respectable friends, are real substantial blessings; and yet do we not daily see those who enjoy many of these good things, contrive notwithstanding to be as unhappy as others to whose lot few of them have fallen? I believe one great source of this mistake or misconduct is owing to a certain stimulus, with us called ambition, which goads us up the hill of life, not as we ascend other eminences, for the laudable curiosity of viewing an extended landscape, but rather for the dishonest pride of looking down on others of our fellow creatures, seemingly diminutive in humbler stations, &c. &c.

Sunday, 14*th February*, 1790.

God help me! I am now obliged to join

"Night to day, and Sunday to the week."

If there be any truth in the orthodox faith of these churches, I am d-mned past redemption, and what is worse, d-mned to all eternity. I am deeply read in Boston's Four-fold State, Marshal on Sanctification, Guthrie's Trial of a Saving Interest, &c.; but "there is no balm in Gilead, there is no physician there," for me; so I shall e'en turn Arminian, and trust to "Sincere though imperfect obedience."

Tuesday, 16*th*.

Luckily for me, I was prevented from the dis-

cussion of the knotty point at which I had just made a full stop. All my fears and care are of this world: if there is another, an honest man has nothing to fear from it. I hate a man that wishes to be a Deist; but I fear, every fair, unprejudiced inquirer must in some degree be a Sceptic. It is not that there are any very staggering arguments against the immortality of man; but like electricity, phlogiston, &c. the subject is so involved in darkness, that we want data to go upon. One thing frightens me much: that we are to live for ever, seems *too good news to be true.* That we are to enter into a new scene of existence, where, exempt from want and pain, we shall enjoy ourselves and our friends without satiety or separation—how much should I be indebted to any one who could fully assure me that this was certain!

My time is once more expired. I will write to Mr. Cleghorn soon. God bless him and all his concerns! And may all the powers that preside over conviviality and friendship, be present with all their kindest influence, when the bearer of this, Mr. Syme, and you meet! I wish I could also make one.

Finally, brethren, farewell! Whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are gentle, whatsoever things are charitable, whatsoever things are kind, think on these things, and think on

R. B.

[Of the gentleman to whom this letter is addressed my friend, James Hogg, in his notes on Burns, says, "The Lament, as well as the song beginning 'O had I a cave,' were written on the occasion of Mr. Alexander Cunningham's darling sweetheart slighting him and marrying another. If I may judge from what I saw of that very amusing and social gentleman, she acted a wise part." If I may judge of the condition of the young lady from what the poet says in the Lament —of the circling and clasping arms, and more pointed still

"The promised father's tender name,"

she acted with little respect to her reputation in forsaking her first love—the only marvel is that she found a second. But the truth is, the Shepherd has made a strange mistake: if his censure of the man is not more accurate than his account of the origin of the Lament, the character of Alexander Cunningham stands where it did. That very affecting poem was composed by the poet on his own sorrows, in the spring of 1786, and published in the Kilmarnock edition of his works, before he ever saw or heard of Alexander the silversmith. He gives this account of it to Dr. Moore. Gilbert Burns confirms him were confirmation required— and indeed no one perhaps is ignorant of it, save him who made the assertion.

The following letter from the pen of Cunningham will be read with interest:

"*Edinburgh, 28th January,* 1790.

"In some instances it is reckoned unpardonable to quote any one's own words, but the value I have for your friendship, nothing can more truly or more elegantly express than

'Time but the impression stronger makes,
As streams their channels deeper wear.'

"Having written to you twice without having heard from you, I am apt to think my letters have miscarried. My conjecture is only framed upon the chapter of accidents turning up against me, as it too often does, in the trivial, and I may with truth add, the more important affairs of life; but I shall continue occasionally to inform you what is going on among the circle of your friends in these parts. In these days of merriment, I have frequently heard your name *proclaimed* at the jovial board—under the roof of our hospitable friend at Stenhouse-mills, there were no

'Lingering moments number'd with care.'

"I saw your Address to the New-year, in the Dumfries Journal. Of your productions I shall say nothing, but my acquaintances allege that when your name is mentioned, which every man of celebrity must know often happens, I am the champion, the Mendoza, against all snarling critics, and narrow-minded reptiles, of whom *a few* on this planet do *crawl*."]

No. CLXVIII.

TO Mr. HILL.

Ellisland, 2d March, 1790.

At a late meeting of the Monkland Friendly Society, it was resolved to augment their library by the following books, which you are to send us as soon as possible:—The Mirror, The Lounger, Man of Feeling, Man of the World, (these, for my own sake, I wish to have by the first carrier), Knox's History of the Reformation; Rae's History of the Rebellion in 1715; any good History of the Rebellion in 1745; A Display of the Secession Act and Testimony, by Mr. Gibb; Hervey's Meditations; Beveridge's Thoughts; and another copy of Watson's Body of Divinity.

I wrote to Mr. A. Masterton three or four months ago, to pay some money he owed me into your hands, and lately I wrote to you to the same purpose, but I have heard from neither one or other of you.

In addition to the books I commissioned in my last, I want very much, An Index to the Excise Laws, or an Abridgement of all the Statutes now in

force, relative to the Excise, by Jellinger Symons; I want three copies of this book; if it is now to be had, cheap or dear, get it for me. An honest country neighbour of mine wants too a Family Bible, the larger the better, but second-handed, for he does not chuse to give above ten shillings for the book. I want likewise for myself, as you can pick them up, second-handed or cheap, copies of Otway's Dramatic Works, Ben Jonson's, Dryden's, Congreve's, Wycherley's, Vanbrugh's, Cibber's, or any Dramatic Works of the more modern, Macklin, Garrick, Foote, Colman, or Sheridan. A good copy too of Moliere, in French, I much want. Any other good dramatic authors in that language I want also; but comic authors chiefly, though I should wish to have Racine, Corneille, and Voltaire too. I am in no hurry for all, or any of these, but if you accidentally meet with them very cheap, get them for me.

And now, to quit the dry walk of business, how do you do, my dear friend? and how is Mrs. Hill? I trust, if now and then not so *elegantly* handsome, at least as amiable, and sings as divinely as ever. My good wife too has a charming "wood-note wild;" now could we four ——.

I am out of all patience with this vile world, for one thing. Mankind are by nature benevolent creatures, except in a few scoundrelly instances. I do not think that avarice of the good things we chance to have, is born with us; but we are placed here

amid so much nakedness, and hunger, and poverty, and want, that we are under a cursed necessity of studying selfishness, in order that we may EXIST! Still there are, in every age, a few souls, that all the wants and woes of life cannot debase to selfishness, or even to the necessary alloy of caution and prudence. If ever I am in danger of vanity, it is when I contemplate myself on this side of my disposition and character. God knows I am no saint; I have a whole host of follies and sins to answer for; but if I could, and I believe I do it as far as I can, I would wipe away all tears from all eyes. Adieu!

R. B.

[That Burns at this period had turned his thoughts on the drama, his order to his bookseller for dramatic works, and his letters to Lady Harriet Don, plainly enough intimate. "No man knows," he thus writes, "what nature has fitted him for till he try: and if after a preparatory course of some years' study of men and books, I should find myself unequal to the task, there is no great harm done. Virtue and study are their own reward. I have got Shakespeare, and begun with him: and I shall stretch a point, and make myself master of all the dramatic authors of any repute in both English and French—the only languages which I know." ED.]

No. CLXIX.

TO Mrs. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 10*th April*, 1790.

I HAVE just now, my ever honoured friend, enjoyed a very high luxury, in reading a paper of the Lounger. You know my national prejudices. I have often read and admired the Spectator, Adventurer, Rambler, and World; but still with a certain regret, that they were so thoroughly and entirely English. Alas! have I often said to myself, what are all the boasted advantages which my country reaps from the union, that can counterbalance the annihilation of her independence, and even her very name! I often repeat that couplet of my favourite poet, Goldsmith—

> " ——— States of native liberty possest,
> Tho' very poor, may yet be very blest."

Nothing can reconcile me to the common terms, " English ambassador, English court," &c. And I am out of all patience to see that equivocal character, Hastings, impeached by " the Commons of England." Tell me, my friend, is this weak prejudice? I believe in my conscience such ideas as " my country; her independence; her honour; the

illustrious names that mark the history of my native land;" &c.—I believe these, among your *men of the world*, men who in fact guide for the most part and govern our world, are looked on as so many modifications of wrongheadedness. They know the use of bawling out such terms, to rouse or lead THE RABBLE; but for their own private use, with almost all the *able statesmen* that ever existed, or now exist, when they talk of right and wrong, they only mean proper and improper; and their measure of conduct is, not what they OUGHT, but what they DARE. For the truth of this I shall not ransack the history of nations, but appeal to one of the ablest judges of men that ever lived—the celebrated Earl of Chesterfield. In fact, a man who could thoroughly control his vices whenever they interfered with his interests, and who could completely put on the appearance of every virtue as often as it suited his purposes, is, on the Stanhopian plan, the *perfect man*; a man to lead nations. But are great abilities, complete without a flaw, and polished without a blemish, the standard of human excellence? This is certainly the staunch opinion of *men of the world*; but I call on honour, virtue, and worth, to give the stygian doctrine a loud negative! However, this must be allowed, that, if you abstract from man the idea of an existence beyond the grave, *then*, the true measure of human conduct is, *proper* and *improper*: virtue and vice, as dispositions of the heart, are, in that case, of scarcely the same

import and value to the world at large, as harmony and discord in the modifications of sound; and a delicate sense of honour, like a nice ear for music, though it may sometimes give the possessor an ecstacy unknown to the coarser organs of the herd, yet, considering the harsh gratings, and inharmonic jars, in this ill-tuned state of being, it is odds but the individual would be as happy, and certainly would be as much respected by the true judges of society as it would then stand, without either a good ear or a good heart.

You must know I have just met with the Mirror and Lounger for the first time, and I am quite in raptures with them; I should be glad to have your opinion of some of the papers. The one I have just read, Lounger, No. 61, has cost me more honest tears than any thing I have read of a long time. Mackenzie has been called the Addison of the Scots, and in my opinion, Addison would not be hurt at the comparison. If he has not Addison's exquisite humour, he as certainly outdoes him in the tender and the pathetic. His Man of Feeling (but I am not counsel learned in the laws of criticism) I estimate as the first performance in its kind I ever saw. From what book, moral or even pious, will the susceptible young mind receive impressions more congenial to humanity and kindness, generosity and benevolence; in short, more of all that ennobles the soul to herself, or endears her to others—than from the simple affecting tale of poor Harley.

Still, with all my admiration of Mackenzie's writings, I do not know if they are the fittest reading for a young man who is about to set out, as the phrase is, to make his way into life. Do not you think, Madam, that among the few favoured of Heaven in the structure of their minds, (for such there certainly are) there may be a purity, a tenderness, a dignity, an elegance of soul, which are of no use, nay, in some degree, absolutely disqualifying for the truly important business of making a man's way into life? If I am not much mistaken, my gallant young friend, A * * * * * *, is very much under these disqualifications; and for the young females of a family I could mention, well may they excite parental solicitude, for I, a common acquaintance, or as my vanity will have it, an humble friend, have often trembled for a turn of mind which may render them eminently happy—or peculiarly miserable!

I have been manufacturing some verses lately; but as I have got the most hurried season of excise business over, I hope to have more leisure to transcribe any thing that may show how much I have the honour to be, Madam,

Yours, &c.

R. B.

[Of all the letters which Burns wrote to Henry Mackenzie, not one has been handed down to us: the following is from the pen of the Man of Feeling, and was

addressed to the poet when about to set off on his Border tour:—

"Dear Sir,

"Amidst a variety of occupations in which I am at this moment engaged, I have only time to scrawl these few lines to return you very sincere and cordial thanks for the engraving and the letter accompanying it. The anecdote you obligingly communicate is not less gratifying to the feelings of the man than flattering to the vanity of the author.

"I heartily wish you a pleasant journey and all happiness and success in the cause and in the objects of it. I hope, as soon as you return to Edinburgh, to have the pleasure of seeing you. Mr. Stewart told me he had given you a letter to Mr. Brydone, otherwise I would have written a few lines to him by you, as he expressed to me a very strong desire to see you at his house on the banks of the Tweed. Once more I wish you every thing pleasant and prosperous.

"Yours very faithfully,

"Henry Mackenzie."

It is singular that the poet read the Mirror and Lounger for the first time in 1790—in the year 1786 there appeared in the latter a generous article from the pen of Mackenzie on the poems of Burns, in which he was placed nigh the summit of the Scottish Parnassus. —Ed.]

No. CLXX.

TO COLLECTOR MITCHELL.

Ellisland, 1790

SIR,

I SHALL not fail to wait on Captain Riddel to-night—I wish and pray that the goddess of justice herself would appear to-morrow among our hon. gentlemen, merely to give them a word in their ear that mercy to the thief is injustice to the honest man. For my part I have galloped over my ten parishes these four days, until this moment that I am just alighted, or rather, that my poor jackass-skeleton of a horse has let me down; for the miserable devil has been on his knees half a score of times within the last twenty miles, telling me in his own way, 'Behold, am not I thy faithful jade of a horse, on which thou hast ridden these many years!'

In short, Sir, I have broke my horse's wind, and almost broke my own neck, besides some injuries in a part that shall be nameless, owing to a hard-

hearted stone for a saddle. I find that every offender has so many great men to espouse his cause, that I shall not be surprised if I am not not committed to the strong hold of the law to-morrow for insolence to the dear friends of the gentlemen of the country.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

your obliged and obedient humble

R. B

[Collector Mitchell was a kind and considerate gentleman, and befriended the poet on several occasions: to his grandson, Mr. John Campbell, surgeon, in Aberdeen I am indebted for this characteristic letter. Ed.]

No. CLXXI.

TO Dr. MOORE.

Dumfries, Excise-Office, 14th July, 1790.

Sir,

Coming into town this morning, to attend my duty in this office, it being collection-day, I met with a gentleman who tells me he is on his way to London; so I take the opportunity of writing to you, as franking is at present under a temporary death. I shall have some snatches of leisure through the day, amid our horrid business and bustle, and I shall improve them as well as I can; but let my letter be as stupid as * * * * * * * * * *, as miscellaneous as a newspaper, as short as a hungry grace-before-meat, or as long as a law-paper in the Douglas cause; as ill spelt as country John's billet-doux, or as unsightly a scrawl as Betty Byre-Mucker's answer to it; I hope, considering circumstances, you will forgive it; and as it will put you to no expense of postage, I shall have the less reflection about it.

I am sadly ungrateful in not returning you my thanks for your most valuable present, *Zeluco*. In fact, you are in some degree blameable for my neglect.

You were pleased to express a wish for my opinion of the work, which so flattered me, that nothing less would serve my over-weening fancy, than a formal criticism on the book. In fact, I have gravely planned a comparative view of you, Fielding, Richardson, and Smollett, in your different qualities and merits as novel-writers. This, I own, betrays my ridiculous vanity, and I may probably never bring the business to bear; and I am fond of the spirit young Elihu shews in the book of Job—"And I said, I will also declare my opinion." I have quite disfigured my copy of the book with my annotations. I never take it up without at the same time taking my pencil, and marking with asterisms, parantheses, &c. wherever I meet with an original thought, a nervous remark on life and manners, a remarkable well-turned period, or a character sketched with uncommon precision.

Though I should hardly think of fairly writing out my "Comparative View," I shall certainly trouble you with my remarks, such as they are.

I have just received from my gentleman that horrid summons in the book of Revelations—"That time shall be no more!"

The little collection of sonnets have some charming poetry in them. If *indeed* I am indebted to the fair author for the book, and not, as I rather suspect to a celebrated author of the other sex, I should certainly have written to the lady, with my grateful acknowledgments, and my own ideas of the

comparative excellence of her pieces., I would do this last, not from any vanity of thinking that my remarks could be of much consequence to Mrs. Smith, but merely from my own feelings as an author, doing as I would be done by. R. B.

[The Sonnets to which Burns alludes were those of Charlotte Smith: the volume which belonged to the poet is now before me; one note alone intimates that the book passed through his hands; the fair authoress, in giving the source of line 14, in the 8th sonnet—

> "Have power to cure all sadness but despair."

quotes Milton—

> "Vernal delight and joy, able to drive
> All sadness but despair."

To this Burns added with the pen

> "He sang sae sweet as might dispel
> A' rage but fell despair."

These lines are to be found in one version at least of the fine ballad of Gill Morrice. Ed.]

No. CLXXII.

TO MR. MURDOCH,

TEACHER OF FRENCH, LONDON.

Ellisland, July 16, 1790.

My Dear Sir,

I received a letter from you a long time ago, but unfortunately as it was in the time of my peregrinations and journeyings through Scotland, I mislaid or lost it, and by consequence your direction along with it. Luckily my good star brought me acquainted with Mr. Kennedy, who I understand, is an acquaintance of yours: and by his means and mediation I hope to replace that link which my unfortunate negligence had so unluckily broke in the chain of our correspondence. I was the more vexed at the vile accident, as my brother William, a journeyman saddler, has been for some time in London; and wished above all things for your direction, that he might have paid his respects to his Father's Friend.

His last address he sent me was, "Wm. Burns, at Mr. Barber's saddler, No. 181, Strand." I writ him by Mr. Kennedy, but neglected to ask him for your address; so, if you find a spare half minute,

please let my brother know by a card where and when he will find you, and the poor fellow will joyfully wait on you, as one of the few surviving friends of the man whose name, and Christian name too, he has the honour to bear.

The next letter I write you shall be a long one, I have much to tell you of "hair-breadth 'scapes in th' imminent deadly breach," with all the eventfull history of a life, the early years of which owed so much to your kind tutorage; but this at an hour of leisure. My kindest compliments to Mrs. Murdoch and family.

I am ever, my dear Sir,

Your obliged friend,

R. B.

[The promised account of himself was never written: but this is the less to be regretted, since we have that which he rendered of his earlier days to Dr. Moore—a valuable memoir, from which all biographers have borrowed, and no one has questioned or contradicted. —Ed.]

No. CLXXIII.

TO MR. M^c^MURDO.

Ellisland, 2nd August, 1790.

SIR,

Now that you are over with the sirens of Flattery, the harpies of Corruption, and the furies of Ambition, these infernal deities, that on all sides, and in all parties, preside over the villainous business of Politics, permit a rustic muse of your acquaintance to do her best to sooth you with a song.—

You knew Henderson—I have not flattered his memory.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your obliged humble Servant,

R. B.

[This brief letter enclosed the admirable poem on the death of Captain Matthew Henderson, and no one could better feel than the gentleman to whom it was addressed the difference between the dissonance of politics, and the harmony of the muse. Who Henderson was has to

me been a source of some solicitude: Mrs. Burns had only heard of his name, and Mrs. Mc Murdo remembered him as an agreeable and witty man, but knew nothing of his lineage. Sir Thomas Wallace was applied to, and his communication afforded a little more light. He was intimate, he said, with Henderson, and much attached to him as all who knew him were. During the stay of Burns in Edinburgh the Captain lived in the High Street, dined regularly at Fortune's Tavern, and was a member of the Capillaire Club which was composed of all who inclined to the witty and the joyous. "With his family," says Sir Thomas, "I was not acquainted: but he was a gentleman of true principles and probity, and for abilities, goodness of heart, gentleness of nature, sprightly wit and sparkling humour would have been an honour to any family in the land." —Ed.]

No. CLXXIV.

TO Mrs. DUNLOP.

8th August, 1790.

Dear Madam,

After a long day's toil, plague, and care, I sit down to write to you. Ask me not why I have delayed it so long? It was owing to hurry, indolence, and fifty other things; in short to any thing —but forgetfulness of *la plus aimable de son sexe*. By the bye, you are indebted your best courtesy to me for this last compliment; as I pay it from my sincere conviction of its truth — a quality rather rare in compliments of these grinning, bowing, scraping times.

Well I hope writing to *you*, will ease a little my troubled soul. Sorely has it been bruised to-day! A ci-devant friend of mine, and an intimate acquaintance of yours, has given my feelings a wound that I perceive will gangrene dangerously ere it cure. He has wounded my pride! R. B.

[I have enquired in vain after the name of this ci-devant friend, and the nature of the quarrel between him and the poet.—Ed.]

No. CLXXV.

TO Mr. CUNNINGHAM.

Ellisland, 8th August, 1790.

Forgive me, my once dear, and ever dear friend, my seeming negligence. You cannot sit down and fancy the busy life I lead.

I laid down my goose feather to beat my brains for an apt simile, and had some thoughts of a country grannum at a family christening; a bride on the market-day before her marriage, or a tavern-keeper at an election-dinner; but the resemblance that hits my fancy best is, that blackguard miscreant Satan, who roams about like a roaring lion, seeking, *searching* whom he may devour. However, tossed about as I am, if I chuse (and who would not chuse) to bind down with the crampets of attention the brazen foundation of integrity, I may rear up the superstructure of Independence, and from its daring turrets, bid defiance to the storms of fate. And is not this a "consummation devoutly to be wished?"

"Thy spirit, Independence, let me share;
Lord of the lion-heart, and eagle-eye!
Thy steps I follow with my bosom bare,
Nor heed the storm that howls along the sky!"

Are not these noble verses? They are the introduction of Smollet's Ode to Independence: if you have not seen the poem, I will send it to you.—How wretched is the man that hangs on by the favours of the great! To shrink from every dignity of man, at the approach of a lordly piece of self-consequence, who amid all his tinsel glitter, and stately hauteur, is but a creature formed as thou art—and perhaps not so well formed as thou art—came into the world a puling infant as thou didst, and must go out of it as all men must, a naked corse.

R. B.

["The preceding letter to Mrs. Dunlop explains the feelings under which this was written. The strain of indignant invective goes on some time longer in the style which our bard was too apt to indulge, and of which the reader has already seen so much."—CURRIE.]

No. CLXXVI

TO CRAUFORD TAIT, Esq.

EDINBURGH.

Ellisland, 15th October, 1790.

Dear Sir,

Allow me to introduce to your acquaintance the bearer, Mr. Wm. Duncan, a friend of mine, whom I have long known and long loved. His father, whose only son he is, has a decent little property in Ayrshire, and has bred the young man to the law, in which department he comes up an adventurer to your good town. I shall give you my friend's character in two words: as to his head, he has talents enough, and more than enough for common life; as to his heart, when nature had kneaded the kindly clay that composes it, she said, "I can no more."

You, my good Sir, were born under kinder stars; but your fraternal sympathy, I well know, can enter into the feelings of the young man, who goes into life with the laudable ambition to *do* something, and to *be* something among his fellow-creatures; but whom the consciousness of friendless

obscurity presses to the earth, and wounds to the soul!

Even the fairest of his virtues are against him. That independent spirit, and that ingenuous modesty, qualities inseparable from a noble mind, are, with the million, circumstances not a little disqualifying. What pleasure is in the power of the fortunate and the happy, by their notice and patronage, to brighten the countenance and glad the heart of such depressed youth. I am not so angry with mankind for their deaf economy of the purse:—The goods of this world cannot be divided without being lessened—but why be a niggard of that which bestows bliss on a fellow-creature, yet takes nothing from our own means of enjoyment? We wrap ourselves up in the cloak of our own better-fortune, and turn away our eyes, lest the wants and woes of our brother-mortals should disturb the selfish apathy of our souls!

I am the worst hand in the world at asking a favour. That indirect address, that insinuating implication, which, without any positive request, plainly expresses your wish, is a talent not to be acquired at a plough-tail. Tell me then, for you can, in what periphrasis of language, in what circumvolution of phrase, I shall envelope, yet not conceal this plain story.—"My dear Mr. Tait, my friend Mr. Duncan, whom I have the pleasure of introducing to you, is a young lad of your own profession, and a gentleman of much modesty, and

great worth. Perhaps it may be in your power to assist him in the, to him, important consideration of getting a place; but at all events, your notice and acquaintance will be a very great acquisition to him; and I dare pledge myself that he will never disgrace your favour."

You may possibly be surprised, Sir, at such a letter from me; 'tis, I own, in the usual way of calculating these matters, more than our acquaintance entitles me to; but my answer is short: Of all the men at your time of life, whom I knew in Edinburgh, you are the most accessible on the side on which I have assailed you. You are very much altered indeed from what you were when I knew you, if generosity point the path you will not tread, or humanity call to you in vain.

As to myself, a being to whose interest I believe you are still a well-wisher; I am here, breathing at all times, thinking sometimes, and rhyming now and then. Every situation has its share of the cares and pains of life, and my situation I am persuaded has a full ordinary allowance of its pleasures and enjoyments.

My best compliments to your father and Miss Tait. If you have an opportunity, please remember me in the solemn league and covenant of friendship to Mrs. Lewis Hay. I am a wretch for not writing her; but I am so hackneyed with self-accusation in that way, that my conscience lies in my bosom with scarce the sensibility of an oyster

in its shell. Where is Lady McKenzie? wherever she is, God bless her! I likewise beg leave to trouble you with compliments to Mr. Wm. Hamilton; Mrs. Hamilton and family; and Mrs. Chalmers, when you are in that country. Should you meet with Miss Nimmo, please remember me kindly to her.

R. B.

No. CLXXVII.

TO ———

Ellisland, 1790.

Dear Sir,

Whether in the way of my trade, I can be of any service to the Rev. Doctor, is I fear very doubtful. Ajax's shield consisted, I think, of seven bull hides and a plate of brass, which altogether set Hector's utmost force at defiance. Alas! I am not a Hector, and the worthy Doctor's foes are as securely armed as Ajax was. Ignorance, superstition, bigotry, stupidity, malevolence, self-conceit, envy — all strongly bound in a massy frame of brazen impudence. Good God, Sir! to such a shield, humour is the peck of a sparrow, and satire the pop-gun of a school-boy. Creation-disgracing

scelerats such as they, God only can mend, and the devil only can punish! In the comprehending way of Caligula, I wish they all had but one neck. I feel impotent as a child to the ardour of my wishes! O for a withering curse to blast the germins of their wicked machinations. O for a poisonous tornado, winged from the torrid zone of Tartarus, to sweep the spreading crop of their villainous contrivances to the lowest hell!

R. B.

[This letter I suspect was addressed to Gavin Hamilton: it enclosed the Kirk's Alarm, written to aid the cause of Dr. McGill. Both the preacher and the poet failed: McGill recanted his heresy, and Burns had the mortification of hurting the feelings of many, without benefitting one. Ed.]

No. CLXXVIII.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, November, 1790.

"As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country."

Fate has long owed me a letter of good news from you, in return for the many tidings of sorrow which I have received. In this instance I most cordially obey the apostle—"Rejoice with them that do rejoice"—for me, *to sing* for joy, is no new thing; but *to preach* for joy, as I have done in the commencement of this epistle, is a pitch of extravagant rapture to which I never rose before.

I read your letter—I literally jumped for joy—How could such a mercurial creature as a poet lumpishly keep his seat on the receipt of the best news from his best friend. I seized my gilt-headed Wangee rod, an instrument indispensably necessary in my left hand, in the moment of inspiration and rapture; and stride, stride—quick and quicker—out skipt I among the broomy banks of Nith to muse over my joy by retail. To keep within the bounds of prose was impossible. Mrs. Little's is a more elegant, but not a more sincere compliment to

the sweet little fellow, than I, extempore almost, poured out to him in the following verses.

> " Sweet flow'ret pledge o' meikle love
> And ward o' mony a prayer,
> What heart o' stane wad thou na move
> Sae helpless, sweet, an' fair.
> November hirples o'er the lea
> Chill on thy lovely form ;
> But gane alas ! the shelt'ring tree
> Should shield thee frae the storm."

(Vide vol. ii. p. 301.)

I am much flattered by your approbation of my *Tam o' Shanter*, which you express in your former letter; though by the bye, you load me in that said letter with accusations heavy and many; to all which I plead, *not guilty!* Your book is, I hear, on the road to reach me. As to printing of poetry, when you prepare it for the press, you have only to spell it right, and place the capital letters properly: as to the punctuation, the printers do that themselves.

I have a copy of *Tam o' Shanter* ready to send you by the first opportunity: it is too heavy to send by post.

I heard of Mr. Corbet lately. He, in consequence of your recommendation, is most zealous to serve me. Please favor me soon with an account of your good folks; if Mrs. H. is recovering, and the young gentleman doing well. R. B.

No. CLXXIX.

TO MR. PETER HILL.

Ellisland, 17th January, 1791.

TAKE these two guineas, and place them over against that d-mned account of yours! which has gagged my mouth these five or six months! I can as little write good things as apologies to the man I owe money to. O the supreme curse of making three guineas do the business of five! Not all the labours of Hercules; not all the Hebrews' three centuries of Egyptian bondage, were such an insuperable business, such an infernal task!! Poverty! thou half-sister of death, thou cousin-german of hell: where shall I find force of execration equal to the amplitude of thy demerits? Oppressed by thee, the venerable ancient, grown hoary in the practice of every virtue, laden with years and wretchedness, implores a little—little aid to support his existence, from a stony-hearted son of Mammon, whose sun of prosperity never knew a cloud; and is by him denied and insulted. Oppressed by thee, the man of sentiment, whose heart glows with independence, and melts with sensibility, inly pines under the neglect, or writhes in

bitterness of soul, under the contumely of arrogant, unfeeling wealth. Oppressed by thee, the son of genius, whose ill-starred ambition plants him at the tables of the fashionable and polite, must see in suffering silence, his remark neglected, and his person despised, while shallow greatness, in his idiot attempts at wit, shall meet with countenance and applause. Nor is it only the family of worth that have reason to complain of thee: the children of folly and vice, though in common with thee the offspring of evil, smart equally under thy rod. Owing to thee, the man of unfortunate disposition and neglected education, is condemned as a fool for his dissipation, despised and shunned as a needy wretch, when his follies as usual bring him to want; and when his unprincipled necessities drive him to dishonest practices, he is abhorred as a miscreant, and perishes by the justice of his country. But far otherwise is the lot of the man of family and fortune. *His* early follies and extravagance, are spirit and fire; *his* consequent wants, are the embarrassments of an honest fellow; and when, to remedy the matter, he has gained a legal commission to plunder distant provinces, or massacre peaceful nations, he returns, perhaps, laden with the spoils of rapine and murder; lives wicked and respected, and dies a scoundrel and a lord.—Nay, worst of all, alas for helpless woman! the needy prostitute, who has shivered at the corner of the street, waiting to earn the wages of casual prosti-

tution, is left neglected and insulted, ridden down by the chariot wheels of the coroneted RIP, hurrying on to the guilty assignation; she who without the same necessities to plead, riots nightly in the same guilty trade.

Well! divines may say of it what they please; but execration is to the mind, what phlebotomy is to the body: the vital sluices of both are wonderfully relieved by their respective evacuations.

R. B.

[The poet's eloquent apostrophe to Poverty has all his usual strength of sentiment and language. In conversation he loved to dwell upon the subject: he felt that without wealth he could not have full independence: he beheld the little that his poems brought melt silently away, and he looked forward with much fear and with little hope. ED.]

No. CLXXX.

TO MR. CUNNINGHAM.

Ellisland, 23d January, 1791.

Many happy returns of the season to you, my dear friend! As many of the good things of this life, as is consistent with the usual mixture of good and evil in the cup of Being!

I have just finished a poem (Tam o' Shanter) which you will receive inclosed. It is my first essay in the way of tales.

I have these several months been hammering at an elegy on the amiable and accomplished Miss Burnet. I have got, and can get, no farther than the following fragment, on which please give me your strictures. In all kinds of poetic composition, I set great store by your opinion; but in sentimental verses, in the poetry of the heart, no Roman Catholic ever set more value on the infallibility of the Holy Father than I do on yours.

I mean the introductory couplets as text verses.

ELEGY

On the late Miss BURNET *of* MONBODDO.

" Life ne'er exulted in so rich a prize,
As Burnet lovely from her native skies;
Nor envious death so triumph'd in a blow,
As that which laid th'accomplish'd Burnet low."

[*Vide vol.* iii. *page* 201.]

Let me hear from you soon. Adieu! R. B.

No. CLXXXI.

TO A. F. TYTLER, Esq.

Ellisland, February, 1791.

Sir,

Nothing less than the unfortunate accident I have met with, could have prevented my grateful acknowledgments for your letter. His own favorite poem, and that an essay in the walk of the muses entirely new to him, where consequently his hopes and fears were on the most anxious alarm for his success in the attempt; to have that poem so much applauded by one of the first judges, was the most delicious vibration that ever thrilled along the heart-strings of a poor poet. However, Providence, to keep up the proper proportion of evil with the good, which it seems is necessary in this sublunary state, thought proper to check my exultation by a very serious misfortune. A day or two after I received your letter, my horse came down with me and broke my right arm. As this is the first service my arm has done me since its disaster, I find myself unable to do more than just in general terms thank you for this additional

instance of your patronage and friendship. As to the faults you detected in the piece, they are truly there: one of them, the hit at the lawyer and priest I shall cut out; as to the falling off in the catastrophe, for the reason you justly adduce it cannot easily be remedied. Your approbation, Sir, has given me such additional spirits to persevere in this species of poetic composition, that I am already revolving two or three stories in my fancy. If I can bring these floating ideas to bear any kind of embodied form, it will give me an additional opportunity of assuring you how much I have the honour to be, &c.

R. B.

[That no one welcomed the appearance of the far-famed Tam o' Shanter with a livelier sense of its merits than the late Lord Woodhouslee, the following letter will testify:

"Hill tells me he is to send off a packet for you this day; I cannot resist, therefore, putting on paper what I must have told you in person, had I met with you after the recent perusal of your tale, which is, that I feel I owe you a debt, which, if undischarged, would reproach me with ingratitude. I have seldom in my life tasted of higher enjoyment from any work of genius, than I have received from this composition; and I am much mistaken if this poem alone, had you never written another syllable, would not have been sufficient to have transmitted your name down to pos-

terity with high reputation. In the introductory part, where you paint the character of your hero, and exhibit him at the alehouse *ingle*, with his tippling cronies, you have delineated nature with a humour and *naïveté*, that would have done honour to Matthew Prior; but when you describe the infernal orgies of the witches' sabbath, and the hellish scenery in which they are exhibited, you display a power of imagination, that Shakspeare himself could not have exceeded. I know not that I have ever met with a picture of more horrible fancy than the following:

'Coffins stood round like open presses,
That shaw'd the dead in their last dresses;
And by some devilish cantrip slight,
Each in his cauld hand held a light.'

But when I came to the succeeding lines, my blood ran cold within me:

'A knife a father's throat had mangled,
Whom his ain son of life bereft;
The gray hairs yet stack to the heft.'

"And here, after the two following lines, 'Wi' mair o' horrible and awfu',' &c. the descriptive part might perhaps have been better closed, than the four lines which succeed, which, though good in themselves, yet as they derive all their merit from the satire they contain, are here rather misplaced among the circumstances of pure horrour. The initiation of the young witch is most happily described—the effect of her charms exhibited in the dance on Satan himself—the apostrophe—'Ah little thought thy reverend graunie!' —the transport of Tam, who forgets his situation, and enters completely into the spirit of the scene, are all features of high merit, in this excellent composition. The only fault it possesses is, that the winding up, or

conclusion of the story, is not commensurate to the interest which is excited by the descriptive and characteristic painting of the preceding parts.—The preparation is fine, but the result is not adequate. But for this perhaps you have a good apology—you stick to the popular tale.

"And now that I have got out my mind, and feel a little relieved of the weight of that debt I owed you, let me end this desultory scroll by an advice:—You have proved your talent for a species of composition, in which but a very few of our own poets have succeeded —Go on—write more tales in the same style—you will eclipse Prior and La Fontaine; for, with equal wit, equal power of numbers, and equal *naïveté* of expression, you have a bolder and more vigorous imagination."

Through the kindness of my friend P. F. Tytler, the historian of Scotland, I am enabled to fill up the chasm in the poem to his grandfather, page 70, vol. iii.

'But why of that epocha make such a fuss,
That gave us the Hanover stem ,
If bringing them over was lucky for us,
I'm sure 'twas as lucky for them."

Why Dr. Currie omitted these lines we have not been told: they seem harmless enough, and the royal stock to which they refer would have smiled at them. Ed.]

No. CLXXXII.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 7th Feb. 1791.

WHEN I tell you, Madam, that by a fall, not from my horse, but with my horse, I have been a cripple some time, and that this is the first day my arm and hand have been able to serve me in writing; you will allow that it is too good an apology for my seemingly ungrateful silence. I am now getting better, and am able to rhyme a little, which implies some tolerable ease; as I cannot think that the most poetic genius is able to compose on the rack.

I do not remember if ever I mentioned to you my having an idea of composing an elegy on the late Miss Burnet, of Monboddo. I had the honour of being pretty well acquainted with her, and have seldom felt so much at the loss of an acquaintance, as when I heard that so amiable and accomplished a piece of God's work was no more. I have, as yet, gone no farther than the following fragment, of which please let me have your opinion. You know that elegy is a subject so much exhausted, that any new idea on the business is not to be expected:

'tis well if we can place an old idea in a new light. How far I have succeeded as to this last, you will judge from what follows.

(*See the Elegy page* 201, *vol.* iii.)

I have proceeded no further.

Your kind letter, with your kind *remembrance* of your godson, came safe. This last, Madam, is scarcely what my pride can bear. As to the little fellow, he is, partiality apart, the finest boy I have of a long time seen. He is now seventeen months old, has the small-pox and measles over, has cut several teeth, and never had a grain of doctor's drugs in his bowels.

I am truly happy to hear that the "little floweret" is blooming so fresh and fair, and that the "mother plant" is rather recovering her drooping head. Soon and well may her "cruel wounds" be healed! I have written thus far with a good deal of difficulty. When I get a little abler you shall hear farther from,

Madam, yours

R. B.

No. CLXXXIII.

TO THE REV. ARCH. ALISON.

Ellisland, near Dumfries, 14th Feb. 1791.

SIR,

YOU must by this time have set me down as one of the most ungrateful of men. You did me the honour to present me with a book, which does honour to science and the intellectual powers of man, and I have not even so much as acknowledged the receipt of it. The fact is, you yourself are to blame for it. Flattered as I was by your telling me that you wished to have my opinion of the work, the old spiritual enemy of mankind, who knows well that vanity is one of the sins that most easily beset me, put it into my head to ponder over the performance with the look-out of a critic, and to draw up forsooth a deep learned digest of strictures on a composition, of which, in fact, until I read the book, I did not even know the first principles. I own, Sir, that at first glance, several of your propositions startled me as paradoxical. That the martial clangor of a trumpet had something in it vastly more grand, heroic, and sublime, than the twingle twangle of a jews-harp: that the delicate flexure of a rose-twig, when the half-blown flower is heavy with the tears of the dawn, was infinitely more beautiful and elegant than the upright stub of

a burdock; and that from something innate and independent of all associations of ideas;—these, I had set down as irrefragable, orthodox truths, until perusing your book shook my faith.—In short, Sir, except Euclid's Elements of Geometry, which I made a shift to unravel by my father's fire-side, in the winter evening of the first season I held the plough, I never read a book which gave me such a quantum of information, and added so much to my stock of ideas, as your "Essays on the Principles of Taste." One thing, Sir, you must forgive my mentioning as an uncommon merit in the work, I mean the language. To clothe abstract philosophy in elegance of style, sounds something like a contradiction in terms; but you have convinced me that they are quite compatible.

I enclose you some poetic bagatelles of my late composition. The one in print is my first essay in the way of telling a tale.

I am, Sir, &c. R. B.

[The eloquent Alison was much pleased, I have heard, with this rustic recognition of the principles which he laid down in his able and popular work. The theory, however, has been rudely shaken by various hands. A man must have forgot nature who at any time preferred a rank weed to a fragrant flower, or thought the skreigh of a clockin' hen more martial than the clang of a trumpet or the cry of the eagle.—But "legs were made for stockings," says Voltaire, "therefore we wear stockings." Ed.]

No. CLXXXIV

TO Dr. MOORE.

Ellisland, 28th January, 1791.

I do not know, Sir, whether you are a subscriber to *Grose's Antiquities of Scotland*. If you are, the inclosed poem will not be altogether new to you. Captain Grose did me the favour to send me a dozen copies of the proof sheet, of which this is one. Should you have read the piece before, still this will answer the principal end I have in view: it will give me another opportunity of thanking you for all your goodness to the rustic bard; and also of shewing you, that the abilities you have been pleased to commend and patronize are still employed in the way you wish.

The *Elegy on Captain Henderson*, is a tribute to the memory of a man I loved much. Poets have in this the same advantage as Roman Catholics; they can be of service to their friends after they have past that bourne where all other kindness ceases to be of avail. Whether after all, either the one or the other be of any real service to the dead, is, I fear, very problematical; but I am sure they are highly gratifying to the living: and as a very orthodox text, I

forget where in scripture, says, "whatsoever is not of faith is sin;" so say I, whatsoever is not detrimental to society, and is of positive enjoyment, is of God, the giver of all good things, and ought to be received and enjoyed by his creatures with thankful delight. As almost all my religious tenets originate from my heart, I am wonderfully pleased with the idea, that I can still keep up a tender intercourse with the dearly beloved friend, or still more dearly beloved mistress, who is gone to the world of spirits.

The ballad on Queen Mary was begun while I was busy with *Percy's Reliques of English Poetry*. By the way, how much is every honest heart, which has a tincture of Caledonian prejudice, obliged to you for your glorious story of Buchanan and Targe! 'Twas an unequivocal proof of your loyal gallantry of soul, giving Targe the victory. I should have been mortified to the ground if you had not.

I have just read over, once more of many times, your *Zeluco*. I marked with my pencil, as I went along, every passage that pleased me particularly above the rest; and one, or two I think, which, with humble deference, I am disposed to think unequal to the merits of the book. I have sometimes thought to transcribe these marked passages, or at least so much of them as to point where they are, and send them to you. Original strokes that strongly depict the human heart, is your and Fielding's province, beyond any other novelist, I have

ever perused. Richardson indeed might perhaps, be excepted; but unhappily, his *dramatis personæ* are beings of another world; and however they may captivate the unexperienced, romantic fancy of a boy or a girl, they will ever, in proportion as we have made human nature our study, dissatisfy our riper years.

As to my private concerns, I am going on, a mighty tax-gatherer before the Lord, and have lately had the interest to get myself ranked on the list of excise as a supervisor. I am not yet employed as such, but in a few years I shall fall into the file of supervisorship by seniority. I have had an immense loss in the death of the Earl of Glencairn; the patron from whom all my fame and fortune took its rise. Independent of my grateful attachment to him, which was indeed so strong that it pervaded my very soul, and was entwined with the thread of my existence: so soon as the prince's friends had got in, (and every dog you know has his day) my getting forward in the excise would have been an easier business than otherwise it will be. Though this was a consummation devoutly to be wished, yet, thank Heaven, I can live and rhyme as I am; and as to my boys, poor little fellows! if I cannot place them on as high an elevation in life, as I could wish, I shall, if I am favoured so much of the Disposer of events as to see that period, fix them on as broad and independent a basis as possible. Among the many wise adages which have been treasured up by our Scottish ancestors, this is one of the best, *Better*

be the head o' the commonalty, than the tail o' the gentry.

But I am got on a subject, which however interesting to me, is of no manner of consequence to you; so I shall give you a short poem on the other page, and close this with assuring you how sincerely I have the honour to be, Your's, &c.

R. B.

Written on the blank leaf of a book, which I presented to a very young lady, whom I had formerly characterised under the denomination of *The Rose Bud.*

"Dr. Moore, it would appear, was less enthusiastic than Lord Woodhouslee in the cause of Tam o'Shanter; nor did he feel the exquisite poetry of the Elegy on Matthew Henderson—he has spoken for himself on the subject—here is his letter:

London, 29th March, 1791.

"DEAR SIR,

YOUR letter of the 28th February I received only two days ago, and this day I had the pleasure of waiting on the Rev. Mr. Baird, at the Duke of Athol's, who had been so obliging as to transmit it to me, with the printed verses on Alloa Church, the Elegy on Capt. Henderson, and the Epitaph. There are many poetical beauties in the former; what I particularly admire are the three striking similes from

'Or like the snow falls on the river,'

and the eight lines which begin with

'By this time he was cross the ford,'

so exquisitely expressive of the superstitious impressions of the country. And the twenty-two lines from

'Coffins stood round like open presses,'

which, in my opinion, are equal to the ingredients of Shakspeare's cauldron in *Macbeth*.

"As for the *Elegy*, the chief merit of it consists in the graphical description of the objects belonging to the country in which the poet writes, and which none but a Scottish poet could have described, and none but a real poet and close observer of Nature could have *so* described.

"There is something original, and wonderfully pleasing, in the *Epitaph*.

"I remember you once hinted before, what you repeat in your last, that you had made some remarks on *Zeluco*, on the margin. I should be very glad to see them, and regret you did not send them before the last edition, which is just published. Pray transcribe them for me; I sincerely value your opinion very highly, and pray do not suppress one of those in which you *censure* the sentiment or expression. Trust me it will break no squares between us—I am not akin to the Bishop of Grenada.

"I must now mention what has been on my mind for some time: I cannot help thinking you imprudent, in scattering abroad so many copies of your verses. It is most natural to give a few to confidential friends, particularly to those who are connected with the subject, or who are perhaps themselves the subject, but this ought to be done under promise not to give other copies. Of the poem you sent me on Queen Mary, I refused every solicitation for copies, but I lately saw it in a newspaper. My motive for cautioning you on this subject is, that I wish to engage you to collect all your fugi-

tive pieces, not already printed, and after they have been re-considered, and polished to the utmost of your power, I would have you publish them by another subscription: in promoting of which I will exert myself with pleasure.

"In your future compositions, I wish you would use the modern English. You have shewn your powers in Scottish sufficiently. Although in certain subjects it gives additional zest to the humour, yet it is lost to the English; and why should you write only for a part of the island, when you can command the admiration of the whole?

"If you chance to write to my friend, Mrs. Dunlop, of Dunlop, I beg to be affectionately remembered to her She must not judge of the warmth of my sentiments respecting her, by the number of my letters; I hardly ever write a line but on business; and I do not know that I should have scribbled all this to you, but for the business part, that is, to instigate you to a new publication; and to tell you, that when you think you have a sufficient number to make a volume, you should set your friends on getting subscriptions. I wish I could have a few hours conversation with you, I have many things to say, which I cannot write. If I ever go to Scotland, I will let you know, that you may meet me at your own house, or my friend Mrs. Hamilton's or both.

"Adieu, my dear Sir, &c." Ed.]

No. CLXXXV.

TO MR. CUNNINGHAM.

Ellisland, 12th March, 1791.

If the foregoing piece be worth your strictures, let me have them. For my own part, a thing that I have just composed, always appears through a double portion of that partial medium in which an author will ever view his own works. I believe in general, novelty has something in it that inebriates the fancy, and not unfrequently dissipates and fumes away like other intoxication, and leaves the poor patient, as usual, with an aching heart. A striking instance of this might be adduced, "in the revolution of many a hymeneal honeymoon." But lest I sink into stupid prose, and so sacrilegiously intrude on the office of my parish priest, I shall fill up the page in my own way, and give you another song of my late composition, which will appear perhaps in Johnson's work, as well as the former.

You must know a beautiful Jacobite air, *There'll never be peace 'till Jamie comes hame*. When political combustion ceases to be the object of princes and patriots, it then, you know, becomes the lawful prey of historians and poets.

" By yon castle wa' at the close of the day,
I heard a man sing, tho' his head it was grey;
And as he was singing, the tears fast down came —
There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame."

[*See vol.* iv. *page* 192.]

If you like the air, and if the stanzas hit your fancy, you cannot imagine, my dear friend, how much you would oblige me, if, by the charms of your delightful voice, you would give my honest effusion to " the memory of joys that are past," to the few friends whom you indulge in that pleasure. But I have scribbled on 'till I hear the clock has intimated the near approach of

" That hour, o' night's black arch the key-stane." —

So good night to you! Sound be your sleep, and delectable your dreams! Apropos, how do you like this thought in a ballad, I have just now on the tapis?

" I look to the west when I gae to rest,
That happy my dreams and my slumbers may be;
Far far in the west is he I lo'e best,
The lad that is dear to my babie and me!"

Good night, once more, and God bless you!

R. B.

[The gentleman to whom this letter is addressed was joyous and companionable: told a pleasing story; sung songs merry or sad with much taste, and was always welcome where wine flowed and mirth abounded. He was from first to last the stedfast friend of Burns: he bestirred himself actively too in behalf of the poet's family. Ed.]

No. CLXXXVI.

TO Mr. ALEXANDER DALZEL,

FACTOR, FINDLAYSTON.

Ellisland, 19th March, 1791.

My Dear Sir,

I have taken the liberty to frank this letter to you, as it encloses an idle poem of mine, which I send you; and God knows you may perhaps pay dear enough for it if you read it through. Not that this is my own opinion; but the author by the time he has composed and corrected his work, has quite pored away all his powers of critical discrimination.

I can easily guess from my own heart, what you have felt on a late most melancholy event. God knows what I have suffered, at the loss of my best friend, my first and dearest patron and benefactor; the man to whom I owe all that I am and have! I am gone into mourning for him, and with more sincerity of grief than I fear some will, who by nature's ties ought to feel on the occasion.

I will be exceedingly obliged to you indeed, to let me know the news of the noble family, how the poor mother and the two sisters support their loss. I had a packet of poetic bagatelles ready to send to

Lady Betty, when I saw the fatal tidings in the newspaper. I see by the same channel that the honoured REMAINS of my noble patron, are designed, to be brought to the family burial place. Dare I trouble you to let me know privately before the day of interment, that I may cross the country, and steal among the crowd, to pay a tear to the last sight of my ever revered benefactor? It will oblige me beyond expression. R. B.

[This gentleman, the factor, or steward, of Burns's noble friend, Lord Glencairn, with a view to encourage a second edition of the poems, laid the volume before his lordship, with such an account of the rustic bard's situation and prospects as from his slender acquaintance with him he could furnish. The result, as communicated to Burns by Mr. Dalzel, is highly creditable to the character of Lord Glencairn. After reading the book, his lordship declared that its merits greatly exceeded his expectation, and he took it with him as a *literary curiosity* to Edinburgh. He repeated his wishes to be of service to Burns, and desired Mr. Dalzel to inform him, that in patronizing the book, ushering it with effect into the world, or treating with the booksellers, he would most willingly give every aid in his power; adding his request, that Burns would take the earliest opportunity of letting him know in what way or manner he could best further his interests. CROMEK.]

No. CLXXXVII.

TO LADY W. M. CONSTABLE.

Ellisland, 11th January, 1791.

My Lady,

Nothing less than the unlucky accident of having lately broken my right arm, could have prevented me the moment I received your ladyship's elegant present by Mrs. Miller, from returning you my warmest and most grateful acknowledgments. I assure your ladyship, I shall set it apart: the symbols of religion shall only be more sacred. In the moment of poetic composition, the box shall be my inspiring genius. When I would breathe the comprehensive wish of benevolence for the happiness of others, I shall recollect your ladyship; when I would interest my fancy in the distresses incident to humanity, I shall remember the unfortunate Mary.

R. B.

[This letter was written acknowledging the present of a valuable snuff-box, with a fine picture of Mary Queen of Scots on the lid. This was the gift of Lady Winni-

fred Maxwell Constable, of the noble family of Nithsdale: a lady equally generous and gentle, and who was not the less respected by the people around because her house had suffered in the cause of the Stuarts. The possessions of the family were once very ample: but few estates thrive in civil wars, rebellions, and confiscations: one noble barony after another passed out of the hands of the Maxwells: and the title was extinguished, never, I fear, to be revived.

The baronial Castle of Caerlaverock on the Solway, and the College of Lincluden on the banks of the Nith, are still included in the family possessions, and are preserved with more care than what is usual with ruins in the South of Scotland. At the family seat, the bed in which Queen Mary slept, during her flight from the fatal field of Langside: a letter from Charles the First, summoning Lord Maxwell with as many armed men as he could muster, to aid him in supporting the crown against the Parliament: and the letter from the last Countess, describing the all but miraculous escape of her husband from the Tower of London in 1715—unite in telling the history of the House of Nithsdale, and the cause—the honourable cause of its decline. ED.]

No. CLXXXVIII.

TO Mrs. GRAHAM,

OF FINTRAY.

Ellisland, 1791.

Madam,

Whether it is that the story of our Mary Queen of Scots, has a peculiar effect on the feelings of a poet, or whether I have in the inclosed ballad, succeeded beyond my usual poetic success, I know not; but it has pleased me beyond any effort of my muse for a good while past; on that account I inclose it particularly to you. It is true, the purity of my motives may be suspected. I am already deeply indebted to Mr Graham's goodness; and what, *in the usual ways of men*, is of infinitely greater importance, Mr. G. can do me service of the utmost importance in time to come. I was born a poor dog; and however I may occasionally pick a better bone than I used to do, I know I must live and die poor: but I will indulge the flattering faith that my poetry will considerably outlive my poverty; and without any fustian affectation of spirit, I can promise and affirm, that it must be no ordinary craving of the latter shall ever make me do any thing injurious to

the honest fame of the former. Whatever may be my failings, for failings are a part of human nature, may they ever be those of a generous heart and an independent mind! It is no fault of mine that I was born to dependence; nor is it Mr. Graham's chiefest praise that he can command influence; but it is his merit to bestow, not only with the kindness of a brother, but with the politeness of a gentleman; and I trust it shall be mine to receive with thankfulness, and remember with undiminished gratitude.

R. B.

[To this lady the poet afterwards presented the new edition of his poems with these characteristic words written on one of the blank leaves:

"It is probable, Madam, that this page may be read when the hand that now writes it shall be mouldering in the dust. May it then bear witness that I present you these volumes as a tribute of gratitude, on my part ardent and sincere, as your and Mr. Graham's goodness to me has been generous and noble. May every child of yours, in the hour of need, find such a friend as I shall teach every child of mine that their father found in you. Robert Burns." Ed.]

No. CLXXXIX.

TO THE Rev. G. BAIRD.

Ellisland, 1791.

Reverend Sir,

Why did you, my dear Sir, write to me in such a hesitating style on the business of poor Bruce? Don't I know, and have I not felt, the many ills, the peculiar ills that poetic flesh is heir to? You shall have your choice of all the unpublished poems I have; and had your letter had my direction so as to have reached me sooner, (it only came to my hand this moment) I should have directly put you out of suspense on the subject. I only ask, that some prefatory advertisement in the book, as well as the subscription bills, may bear, that the publication is solely for the benefit of Bruce's mother. I would not put it in the power of ignorance to surmise, or malice to insinuate, that I clubbed a share in the work from mercenary motives. Nor need you give me credit for any remarkable generosity in my part of the business. I have such a host of peccadilloes, failings, follies, and backslidings (any body but myself might perhaps give some of them a worse appellation) that by way of some balance, however trifling, in the account, I

am fain to do any good that occurs in my very limited power to a fellow-creature, just for the selfish purpose of clearing a little the vista of retrospection. R. B.

[The poet's reverend correspondent solicited his help in the contemplated edition of Bruce in these words :—

" *London, 8th February*, 1791.

" SIR,

" I TROUBLE you with this letter to inform you that I am in hopes of being able very soon to bring to the press a new edition (long since talked of) of Michael Bruce's Poems. The profits of the edition are to go to his mother—a woman of eighty years of age—poor and helpless. The poems are to be published by subscription; and it may be possible, I think, to make out a 2s. 6d. or 3s. volume, with the assistance of a few hitherto unpublished verses, which I have got from the mother of the poet.

" But the design I have in view in writing to you, is not merely to inform you of these facts, it is to solicit the aid of your name and pen in support of the scheme. The reputation of Bruce is already high with every reader of classical taste, and I shall be anxious to guard against tarnishing his character, by allowing any new poems to appear that may lower it. For this purpose, the MSS. I am in possession of, have been submitted to the revision of some whose critical talents I can trust to, and I mean still to submit them to others.

" May I beg to know, therefore, if you will take the trouble of perusing the MSS.—of giving your opinion, and suggesting what curtailments, alterations, or amend-

ments, occur to you as advisable? And will you allow us to let it be known, that a few lines by you will be added to the volume?

"I know the extent of this request. It is bold to make it. But I have this consolation, that though you see it proper to refuse it, you will not blame me for having made it; you will see my apology in the *motive*.

"May I just add, that Michael Bruce is one in whose company, from his past appearance, you would not, I am convinced, blush to be found, and as I would submit every line of his that should now be published, to your own criticisms, you would be assured that nothing derogatory either to him or you, would be admitted in that appearance he may make in future.

"You have already paid an honourable tribute to kindred genius, in Fergusson—I fondly hope that the mother of Bruce will experience your patronage.

"I wish to have the subscription papers circulated by the 14th of March, Bruce's birth-day; which I understand some friends in Scotland talk this year of observing—at that time it will be resolved, I imagine, to place a plain, humble stone over his grave. This, at least, I trust you will agree to do—to furnish, in a few couplets, an *inscription* for it.

"On these points may I solicit an answer as early as possible; a short delay might disappoint us in procuring that relief to the mother, which is the object of the whole.

"You will be pleased to address for me under cover to the Duke of Athole, London." G. B.]

No. CXC.

TO Mrs. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 11th April, 1791.

I AM once more able, my honoured friend, to return you, with my own hand, thanks for the many instances of your friendship, and particularly for your kind anxiety in this last disaster, that my evil genius had in store for me. However, life is chequered — joy and sorrow — for on Saturday morning last, Mrs. Burns made me a present of a fine boy; rather stouter, but not so handsome as your godson was at his time of life. Indeed I look on your little namesake to be my *chef d'œuvre* in that species of manufacture, as I look on Tam o'Shanter to be my standard performance in the poetical line. 'Tis true, both the one and the other discover a spice of roguish waggery, that might perhaps be as well spared; but then they also shew, in my opinion, a force of genius, and a finishing polish, that I despair of ever excelling. Mrs. Burns is getting stout again, and laid as lustily about her to-day at breakfast, as a reaper from the corn-ridge. That is the peculiar privilege and blessing of our hale, sprightly damsels, that are bred among the *hay and heather.* We cannot hope

for that highly polished mind, that charming delicacy of soul, which is found among the female world in the more elevated stations of life, and which is certainly by far the most bewitching charm in the famous cestus of Venus. It is indeed such an inestimable treasure, that where it can be had in its native heavenly purity, unstained by some one or other of the many shades of affectation, and unalloyed by some one or other of the many species of caprice, I declare to Heaven, I should think it cheaply purchased at the expense of every other earthly good! But as this angelic creature is, I am afraid, extremely rare in any station and rank of life, and totally denied to such a humble one as mine, we meaner mortals must put up with the next rank of female excellence—as fine a figure and face we can produce as any rank of life whatever; rustic, native grace; unaffected modesty, and unsullied purity; nature's mother-wit, and the rudiments of taste; a simplicity of soul, unsuspicious of, because unacquainted with, the crooked ways of a selfish, interested, disingenuous world; and the dearest charm of all the rest, a yielding sweetness of disposition, and a generous warmth of heart, grateful for love on our part, and ardently glowing with a more than equal return; these, with a healthy frame, a sound, vigorous constitution, which your higher ranks can scarcely ever hope to enjoy, are the charms of lovely woman in my humble walk of life.

This is the greatest effort my broken arm has yet made. Do let me hear, by first post, how *cher petit Monsieur* comes on with his small-pox. May almighty goodness preserve and restore him!

R. B.

[Homer's description of the Cestus of Venus has been rendered into English by many skilful hands: here are four versions.

"In this was every art and every charm,
To win the wisest and the coldest warm.
Fond love, the gentle vow, the gay desire,
The kind deceit, the still-reviving fire,
Persuasive speech, and more persuasive sighs,
Silence that spoke, and eloquence of eyes."

POPE.

"She spoke, and from her heaving bosom loosed the various girdle with care. There contained were her soul-winning charms. There was love; there melting desire, there, of lovers, the tender vows — the pleasing flattery was there which takes by stealth the souls of the wise."

MACPHERSON.

"It was an ambush of sweet snares, replete
With love, desire, soft intercourse of hearts,
And music of resistless whisper'd sounds,
Which from the wisest win their best resolves."

COWPER.

"Then from her breast unclasped the embroider'd zone,
Where each embellishment divinely shone.
There dwell the allurements, all that love inspire,
There soft seduction, there intense desire,
There witchery of words, whose flatteries weave
Wiles that the wisdom of the wise deceive."

SOTHEBY.

ED.]

No. CXCI.

TO ———.

Ellisland, 1791.

Dear Sir,

I am exceedingly to blame in not writing you long ago; but the truth is, that I am the most indolent of all human beings; and when I matriculate in the herald's office, I intend that my supporters shall be two sloths, my crest a slow-worm, and the motto, "Deil tak t' e foremost." So much by way of apology for not thanking you sooner for your kind execution of my commission.

I would have sent you the poem; but somehow or other it found its way into the public papers, where you must have seen it.

I am ever, dear Sir, yours sincerely,

R. B.

[The poem to which the poet alludes is the Lament of Mary Queen of Scots: that his works found their way to the newspapers could excite no wonder: he gave copies to many of his friends, and they in their turn distributed copies among their acquaintances. Burns seems never to have surmised that he was injuring his own pocket by this practice: the poems which he wrote at Ellisland, and the songs which he composed for Johnson and Thomson, would have made a volume, and brought him a thousand pounds.—Ed.]

No. CXCII.

TO -

Ellisland, 1791.

Thou eunuch of language: thou Englishman who never was south the Tweed: thou servile echo of fashionable barbarisms: thou quack, vending the nostrums of empirical elocution: thou marriage-maker between vowels and consonants, on the Gretna-green of caprice: thou cobbler, botching the flimsy socks of bombast oratory: thou black smith, hammering the rivets of absurdity: thou butcher, embruing thy hands in the bowels of orthography: thou arch-heretic in pronunciation: thou pitch-pipe of affected emphasis: thou carpenter, mortising the aukward joints of jarring sentences: thou squeaking dissonance of cadence: thou pimp of gender: thou Lyon Herald to silly etymology: thou antipode of grammar: thou executioner of construction: thou brood of the speech-distracting builders of the Tower of Babel: thou lingual confusion worse confounded: thou scape-gallows from the land of syntax: thou scavenger of mood and tense: thou murderous accoucheur of infant learning: thou *ignis fatuus*, misleading the

steps of benighted ignorance: thou pickle-herring in the puppet-show of nonsense: thou faithful recorder of barbarous idiom: thou persecutor of syllabication: thou baleful meteor, foretelling and facilitating the rapid approach of Nox and Erebus.

R. B.

[This singular letter was, it is believed, sent to a critic who had taken the poet to task about obscure language and imperfect grammar: he delighted in this sort of scolding, and employed it sometimes very happily in conversation to repel petulance and confound those

"Word-catchers who live on syllables,"

that infested society then as they do now. The language which Burns used in his poetry was new to many: no one had dared to use the mother-tongue with such boldness before, and it has even been surmised by one of his editors that he created words whenever he wanted them. Those who are intimately acquainted with the language of Scotland will acquit Burns of the charge: the words instanced against him, "cootie" and "heugh," are right old Scottish, and current in Ayrshire, Galloway, and the county of Dumfries.—ED.]

No. CXCIII.

TO MR. CUNNINGHAM.

11*th June*, 1791.

LET me interest you, my dear Cunningham, in behalf of the gentleman who waits on you with this. He is a Mr. Clarke, of Moffat, principal schoolmaster there, and is at present suffering severely under the persecution of one or two powerful individuals of his employers. He is accused of harshness to boys that were placed under his care. God help the teacher, if a man of sensibility and genius, and such is my friend Clarke, when a booby father presents him with his booby son, and insists on lighting up the rays of science, in a fellow's head whose skull is impervious and inaccessible by any other way than a positive fracture with a cudgel: a fellow whom in fact it savours of impiety to attempt making a scholar of, as he has been marked a blockhead in the book of fate, at the almighty fiat of his Creator.

The patrons of Moffat-school are, the ministers, magistrates, and town-council of Edinburgh, and as the business comes now before them, let me beg my dearest friend to do every thing in his power to

serve the interests of a man of genius and worth, and a man whom I particularly respect and esteem. You know some good fellows among the magistracy and council, but particuarly you have much to say with a reverend gentleman to whom you have the honour of being very nearly related, and whom this country and age have had the honour to produce. I need not name the historian of Charles V. I tell him through the medium of his nephew's influence. that Mr. Clarke is a gentleman who will not disgrace even his patronage. I know the merits of the cause thoroughly, and say it, that my friend is falling a sacrifice to prejudiced ignorance.

God help the children of dependence! Hated and persecuted by their enemies, and too often, alas! almost unexceptionably, received by their friends with disrespect and reproach, under the thin disguise of cold civility and humiliating advice. O! to be a sturdy savage, stalking in the pride of his independence, amid the solitary wilds of his deserts; rather than in civilized life, helplessly to tremble for a subsistence, precarious as the caprice of a fellow-creature! Every man has his virtues, and no man is without his failings; and curse on that privileged plain-dealing of friendship, which in the hour of my calamity, cannot reach forth the helping hand without at the same time pointing out those failings, and apportioning them their share in procuring my present distress. My friends, for such the world calls ye, and such ye think your-

selves to be, pass by my virtues if you please, but do, also, spare my follies: the first will witness in my breast for themselves, and the last will give pain enough to the ingenuous mind without you. And since deviating more or less from the paths of propriety and rectitude, must be incident to human nature, do thou, Fortune, put it in my power, always from myself, and of myself, to bear the consequence of those errors! I do not want to be independent that I may sin, but I want to be independent in my sinning.

To return in this rambling letter to the subject I set out with, let me recommend my friend, Mr. Clarke, to your acquaintance and good offices; his worth entitles him to the one, and his gratitude will merit the other. I long much to hear from you. Adieu!

R. B.

[To the person on whose behalf he sought to interest his friend, Burns addressed many letters, which were carefully preserved till the death of Mr. Clarke, when his widow, offended by some free language in which they indulged, committed them to the flames. Ed.]

No. CXCIV.

TO THE EARL OF BUCHAN

Ellisland, 1791.

My Lord,

Language sinks under the ardour of my feelings when I would thank your lordship for the honour you have done me in inviting me to make one at the coronation of the bust of Thomson. In my first enthusiasm in reading the card you did me the honour to write me, I overlooked every obstacle, and determined to go; but I fear it will not be in my power. A week or two's absence, in the very middle of my harvest, is what I much doubt I dare not venture on. I once already made a pilgrimage *up* the whole course of the Tweed, and fondly would I take the same delightful journey *down* the windings of that delightful stream.

Your lordship hints at an ode for the occasion: but who would write after Collins? I read over his verses to the memory of Thomson, and despaired.—I got indeed to the length of three or four stanzas, in the way of address to the shade of the bard, on crowning his bust. I shall trouble your lordship with the subjoined copy of them, which, I am afraid, will be but too convincing a proof how

unequal I am to the task. However, it affords me an opportunity of approaching your lordship, and declaring how sincerely and gratefully I have the honour to be, &c. R. B.

[In the following terms the noble lord invited the poet to his seat at Dryburgh:

"Lord Buchan has the pleasure to invite Mr. Burns to make one at the coronation of the bust of Thomson, on Ednam Hill, on the 22nd of September; for which day perhaps his muse may inspire an ode suited to the occasion. Suppose Mr. Burns should, leaving the Nith, go across the country, and meet the Tweed at the nearest point from his farm—and, wandering along the pastoral banks of Thomson's pure parent stream, catch inspiration on the devious walk, till he finds Lord Buchan sitting on the ruins of Dryburgh. There the Commendator will give him a hearty welcome, and try to light his lamp at the pure flame of native genius, upon the altar of Caledonian virtue. This poetical perambulation of the Tweed, is a thought of the late Sir Gilbert Elliot's, and of Lord Minto's, followed out by his accomplished grandson, the present Sir Gilbert, who having been with Lord Buchan lately, the project was renewed, and will, they hope, be executed in the manner proposed."

The public praised the verses, on which the Commendator of Dryburgh wrote to the poet as follows:

"Your address to the shade of Thomson has been well received by the public; and though I should disapprove of your allowing Pegasus to ride you off the

field of your honourable and useful profession, yet I cannot resist an impulse which I feel at this moment to suggest to your muse, Harvest Home, as an excellent subject for her grateful song, in which the peculiar aspect and manners of our country might furnish an excellent portrait and landscape of Scotland, for the employment of happy moments of leisure and recess from your more important occupations.

"Your Halloween, and Saturday Night, will remain to distant posterity as interesting pictures of rural innocence and happiness in your native country, and were happily written in the dialect of the people; but Harvest Home being suited to descriptive poetry, except where colloquial, may escape the disguise of a dialect which admits of no elegance or dignity of expression. Without the assistance of any god or goddess, and without the invocation of any foreign muse, you may convey in epistolary form the description of a scene so gladdening and picturesque, with all the concomitant local position, landscape and costume, contrasting the peace, improvement, and happiness of the borders, of the once hostile nations of Britain, with their former oppression and misery, and showing in lively and beautiful colours, the beauties and joys of a rural life. And as the unvitiated heart is naturally disposed to overflow with gratitude in the moment of prosperity, such a subject would furnish you with an amiable opportunity of perpetuating the names of Glencairn, Miller, and your other eminent benefactors; which, from what I know of your spirit, and have seen of your poems and letters, will not deviate from the chastity of praise, that is so uniformly united to true taste and genius."

The taste of his lordship was questionable in matters

of art as well as in those of verse. He caused an immense statue of William Wallace to be manufactured and fixed on an eminence near his residence. It stands overlooking the fine vale and ruins, an Ogre rather than a man. Ed.]

No. CXCV.

TO Mr. THOMAS SLOAN.

Ellisland, Sept. 1, 1791.

My dear Sloan,

Suspense is worse than disappointment, for that reason I hurry to tell you that I just now learn that Mr. Ballantine does not choose to interfere more in the business. I am truly sorry for it, but cannot help it.

You blame me for not writing you sooner, but you will please to recollect that you omitted one little necessary piece of information;—your address. However, you know equally well, my hurried life, indolent temper, and strength of attachment. It must be a longer period than the longest life "in the world's hale and undegenerate days," that will make me forget so dear a friend as Mr. Sloan. I am prodigal enough at times, but I will not part with such a treasure as that.

I can easily enter into the *embarras* of your present situation. You know my favourite quotation from Young—

> ——"On Reason build RESOLVE!
> That column of true majesty in man."—

And that other favourite one from Thomson's Alfred—

> "What proves the hero truly GREAT,
> Is, never, never to despair."

Or, shall I quote you an author of your acquaintance?

> "——Whether DOING, SUFFERING, or FORBEARING,
> You may do miracles by—PERSEVERING."

I have nothing new to tell you. The few friends we have are going on in the old way. I sold my crop on this day se'ennight, and sold it very well. A guinea an acre, on an average, above value. But such a scene of drunkenness was hardly ever seen in this country. After the roup was over, about thirty people engaged in a battle, every man for his own hand, and fought it out for three hours. Nor was the scene much better in the house. No fighting indeed, but folks lying drunk on the floor, and decanting, until both my dogs got so drunk by attending them, that they could not stand. You will easily guess how I enjoyed the scene; as I was no farther over than you used to see me.

Mrs. B. and family have been in Ayrshire these many weeks.

Farewell! and God bless you, my dear Friend!

R. B.

[Thomas Sloan was a west of Scotland man, and seems to have been on intimate terms with Burns. He accompanied him on that excursion to Wanlockhead when Burns moved a blacksmith, by his verse and his wit, to frost the shoes of his horse as related at page 191, vol. iii. Ed.]

No. CXCVI.

TO LADY E. CUNNINGHAM.

My Lady,

I would, as usual, have availed myself of the privilege your goodness has allowed me, of sending you any thing I compose in my poetical way; but as I had resolved, so soon as the shock of my irreparable loss would allow me, to pay a tribute to my late benefactor, I determined to make that the first piece I should do myself the honour of sending you. Had the wing of my fancy been equal to the ardour of my heart, the enclosed had been much more worthy your perusal: as it is, I beg leave to lay it at your ladyship's feet. As all the world knows my obligations to the late Earl of Glencairn, I would wish to shew as openly, that my heart glows, and shall ever glow, with the most grateful sense and remembrance of his lordship's goodness. The sables I did myself the honour to wear to his lordship's memory, were not the "mockery of woe."

Nor shall my gratitude perish with me!—If, among my children, I shall have a son that has a heart, he shall hand it down to his child as a family honour, and a family debt, that my dearest existence I owe to the noble house of Glencairn!

I was about to say, my lady, that if you think the poem may venture to see the light, I would, in some way or other, give it to the world.

R. B.

[The poem enclosed was The Lament for James, Earl of Glencairn. It is probable that the Earl's sister thought well of the verses—for they were published soon after. The poet sent copies of "The Lament" and "The Whistle" to Mr. Tytler, afterwards Lord Woodhouselee; the answer which he received contains judicious censure as well as merited praise.

"The ballad of 'The Whistle' is, in my opinion, truly excellent. The old tradition which you have taken up, is the best adapted for a Bacchanalian composition of any I have ever met with, and you have done it full justice. In the first place, the strokes of wit arise naturally from the subject, and are uncommonly happy. For example,

'The bands grew the tighter, the more they were wet.'

'Cynthia hinted she'd find them next morn.'

'Tho' fate said a hero should perish in light,
So up rose bright Phœbus, and down fell the knight.'

In the next place, you are singularly happy in the discrimination of your heroes, and in giving each the

sentiments and language suitable to his character. And, lastly, you have much merit in the delicacy of the panegyrick which you have contrived to throw on each of the *dramatis personæ*, perfectly appropriate to his character. The compliment to Sir Robert, the blunt soldier, is peculiarly fine. In short, this composition, in my opinion, does you great honour, and I see not a line or a word in it which I would wish to be altered.

"As to 'The Lament,' I suspect from some expressions in your letter to me, that you are more doubtful with respect to the merits of this piece than of the other, and I own I think you have reason; for, although it contains some beautiful stanzas, as the first, 'The wind blew hollow,' &c.; the fifth, 'Ye scatter'd birds;' the thirteenth, 'Awake thy last sad voice,' &c., yet it appears to me faulty as a whole, and inferior to several of those you have already published in the same strain. My principal objection lies against the plan of the piece. I think it was unnecessary and improper to put the lamentation in the mouth of a fictitious character, an *aged bard*.—It had been much better to have lamented your patron in your own person, to have expressed your genuine feelings for his loss, and to have spoken the language of nature, rather than that of fiction on the subject. Compare this with your poem of the same title in your printed volume, which begins, '*O thou pale Orb!*' and observe what it is that forms the charm of that composition. It is, that it speaks the language of *truth* and of *nature*." Ed.]

No. CXCVII.

TO Mr. AINSLIE.

Ellisland, 1791.

My dear Ainslie,

Can you minister to a mind diseased? can you, amid the horrors of penitence, regret, remorse, head-ache, nausea, and all the rest of the d——d hounds of hell, that beset a poor wretch, who has been guilty of the sin of drunkenness—can you speak peace to a troubled soul?

Miserable perdu that I am, I have tried every thing that used to amuse me, but in vain: here must I sit, a monument of the vengeance laid up in store for the wicked, slowly counting every chick of the clock as it slowly, slowly, numbers over these lazy scoundrels of hours, who, d—n them, are ranked up before me, every one at his neighbour's backside, and every one with a burthen of anguish on his back, to pour on my devoted head—and there is none to pity me. My wife scolds me! my business torments me, and my sins come staring me in the face, every one telling a more bitter tale than his fellow.—When I tell you even * * * has lost its power to please, you will guess something of my hell within, and all around me—I began

Elibanks and Elibraes, but the stanzas fell unenjoyed, and unfinished from my listless tongue: at last I luckily thought of reading over an old letter of yours, that lay by me in my book-case, and I felt something for the first time since I opened my eyes, of pleasurable existence.——Well—I begin to breathe a little, since I began to write to you. How are you, and what are you doing? How goes Law? Apropos, for connexion's sake do not address to me supervisor, for that is an honour I cannot pretend to—I am on the list, as we call it, for a supervisor, and will be called out by and bye to act as one; but at present, I am a simple gauger, tho' t'other day I got an appointment to an excise division of 25*l. per annum* better than the rest. My present income, down money, is 70*l. per annum*.

I have one or two good fellows here whom you would be glad to know. R. B.

[The poet was one of the most candid of correspondents: he confessed his follies freely to his friends: nay it has been surmised that he sometimes aggravated them, in order to excuse his indolence in answering letters—or from imagining that it was incumbent in a son of song to maintain a reputation of irregularity. —Ed.]

No. CXCVIII.

TO MISS DAVIES.

It is impossible, Madam, that the generous warmth and angelic purity of your youthful mind, can have any idea of that moral disease under which I unhappily must rank as the chief of sinners; I mean a torpitude of the moral powers, that may be called, a lethargy of conscience.—In vain Remorse rears her horrent crest, and rouses all her snakes: beneath the deadly-fixed eye and leaden hand of Indolence, their wildest ire is charmed into the torpor of the bat, slumbering out the rigours of winter in the chink of a ruined wall. Nothing less, Madam, could have made me so long neglect your obliging commands. Indeed I had one apology—the bagatelle was not worth presenting. Besides, so strongly am I interested in Miss Davies's fate and welfare in the serious business of life, amid its chances and changes: that to make her the subject of a silly ballad, is downright mockery of these ardent feelings; 'tis like an impertinent jest to a dying friend.

Gracious Heaven! why this disparity between our wishes and our powers? Why is the most generous wish to make others blest, impotent and ineffectual—as the idle breeze that crosses the path-

less desert? In my walks of life I have met with a few people to whom how gladly would I have said—"Go, be happy! I know that your hearts have been wounded by the scorn of the proud, whom accident has placed above you—or worse still, in whose hands are, perhaps, placed many of the comforts of your life. But there! ascend that rock, Independence, and look justly down on their littleness of soul. Make the worthless tremble under your indignation, and the foolish sink before your contempt; and largely impart that happiness to others, which, I am certain will give yourselves so much pleasure to bestow."

Why, dear Madam, must I wake from this delightful reverie, and find it all a dream? Why, amid my generous enthusiasm, must I find myself poor and powerless, incapable of wiping one tear from the eye of pity, or of adding one comfort to the friend I love!—Out upon the world! say I, that its affairs are administered so ill! They talk of reform;—good Heaven! what a reform would I make among the sons, and even the daughters of men!—Down, immediately, should go fools from the high places where misbegotten chance has perked them up, and through life should they skulk, ever haunted by their native insignificance, as the body marches accompanied by its shadow.—As for a much more formidable class, the knaves, I am at a loss what to do with them: Had I a world, there should not be a knave in it.

But the hand that could give, I would liberally fill: and I would pour delight on the heart that could kindly forgive, and generously love.

Still the inequalities of life are, among men, comparatively tolerable—but there is a delicacy, a tenderness, accompanying every view in which we can place lovely Woman, that are grated and shocked at the rude, capricious distinctions of Fortune. Woman is the blood-royal of life: let there be slight degrees of precedency among them—but let them be ALL sacred.—Whether this last sentiment be right or wrong, I am not accountable; it is an original component feature of my mind.

R. B.

[Those who remember the pleasing society which, in the year 1791, Dumfries afforded, cannot have forgotten "the charming lovely Davies" of the lyrics of Burns. Her maiden name was Deborah, and she was the youngest daughter of Dr. Davies of Tenby in Pembrokeshire: between her and the Riddels of Friars Carse there were ties of blood or friendship, and her eldest sister, Harriet, was married to Captain Adam Gordon, of the noble family of Kenmure. Her education was superior to that of most young ladies of her station of life: she was equally agreeable and witty: her company was much courted in Nithsdale and others than Burns respected her talents in poetic composition. She was then in her twentieth year, and so little and so handsome that some one, who desired to compliment her, welcomed her to the Vale of Nith as one of the Graces in miniature.

It was the destiny of Miss Davies to become acquainted with Captain Delany, a pleasant and sightly man, who made himself acceptable to her by sympathizing in her pursuits, and by writing verses to her, calling her his "Stella," an ominous name, which might have brought the memory of Swift's unhappy mistress to her mind. An offer of marriage was made and accepted: but Delany's circumstances were urged as an obstacle; delays ensued; a coldness on the lover's part followed: his regiment was called abroad, he went with it; she heard from him once and no more, and was left to mourn the change of affection—to droop and die. He perished in battle or by a foreign climate, soon after the death of the young lady, of whose love he was so unworthy.

The following verses on this unfortunate attachment form part of a poem found among her papers at her death: she takes Delany's portrait from her bosom, presses it to her lips, and says,

'Next to thyself 'tis all on earth,
Thy Stella dear doth hold,
The glass is clouded with my breath,
And as my bosom cold:
That bosom which so oft has glowed,
With love and friendship's name,
Where you the seed of love first sowed,
That kindled into flame.

'You there neglected let it burn,
It seized the vital part,
And left my bosom as an urn
To hold a broken heart;
I once had thought I should have been
A tender happy wife,
And past my future days serene
With thee my James through life.'

The information contained in this note was obligingly communicated to me by H. P. Davies, Esq. nephew of the lady. Ed.]

No. CXCIX.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Ellisland, 17*th December*, 1791.

MANY thanks, to you, Madam, for your good news respecting the little floweret and the mother-plant. I hope my poetic prayers have been heard, and will be answered up to the warmest sincerity of their fullest extent; and then Mrs. Henri will find her little darling the representative of his late parent, in every thing but his abridged existence.

I have just finished the following song, which to a lady the descendant of Wallace—and many heroes of his truly illustrious line—and herself the mother of several soldiers, needs neither preface nor apology.

"*Scene—A field of battle—time of the day, evening; the wounded and dying of the victorious army are supposed to join in the following*

SONG OF DEATH.

Farewell, thou fair day, thou green earth, and ye skies
Now gay with the bright setting sun;
Farewell, loves and friendships, ye dear, tender ties—
Our race of existence is run!"

(*See vol.* iv. *page* 267.)

The circumstance that gave rise to the foregoing verses was, looking over with a musical friend M'Donald's collection of Highland airs, I was struck with one, an Isle of Skye tune, entitled "Oran an Aoig, or, the Song of Death," to the measure of which I have adapted my stanzas. I have of late composed two or three other little pieces, which, ere yon full-orbed moon, whose broad impudent face now stares at old mother earth all night, shall have shrunk into a modest crescent, just peeping forth at dewy dawn, I shall find an hour to transcribe for you. *A Dieu je vous commende.* R. B.

[To the friendship of this accomplished lady we owe many of the best of the poet's letters:—it was one of his remarks, that between the men of rustic life and the polite world he observed little difference—that in the former, though unpolished by fashion, and unenlightened by science, he had found much observation and much intelligence; but a refined and accomplished woman was a being almost new to him, and of which he had formed but a very inadequate idea. CROMEK.]

No. CC.

TO Mrs. DUNLOP.

5th January, 1792.

You see my hurried life, Madam: I can only command starts of time; however, I am glad of one thing; since I finished the other sheet, the political blast that threatened my welfare is overblown. I have corresponded with Commissioner Graham, for the board had made me the subject of their animadversions; and now I have the pleasure of informing you, that all is set to rights in that quarter. Now as to these informers, may the devil be let loose to —— but, hold! I was praying most fervently in my last sheet, and I must not so soon fall a swearing in this.

Alas! how little do the wantonly or idly officious think what mischief they do by their malicious insinuations, indirect impertinence, or thoughtless blabbings. What a difference there is in intrinsic worth, candour, benevolence, generosity, kindness, —in all the charities and all the virtues; between one class of human beings and another. For instance, the amiable circle I so lately mixed with in the hospitable hall of Dunlop, their generous hearts — their uncontaminated dignified minds — their informed and polished understandings—what

a contrast, when compared—if such comparing, were not downright sacrilege—with the soul of the miscreant who can deliberately plot the destruction of an honest man that never offended him, and with a grin of satisfaction see the unfortunate being, his faithful wife, and prattling innocents, turned over to beggary and ruin!

Your cup, my dear Madam, arrived safe. I had two worthy fellows dining with me the other day, when I, with great formality, produced my whigmeeleerie cup, and told them that it had been a family-piece among the descendants of William Wallace. This roused such an enthusiasm, that they insisted on bumpering the punch round in it; and by and by, never did your great ancestor lay a *Suthron* more completely to rest, than for a time did your cup my two friends. Apropos, this is the season of wishing. May God bless you, my dear friend, and bless me, the humblest and sincerest of your friends, by granting you yet many returns of the season! May all good things attend you and yours wherever they are scattered over the earth! R. B.

[The poet spoke mildly to Mrs. Dunlop concerning the conduct of the excise in the affair of what he called his political delinquencies: he was not so bird-mouthed to Erskine of Mar: his letter to that gentleman will remain a monument to the eternal dishonour of the government of that day, and the Board of Commissioners. Ed.]

No. CCI.

TO Mr. WILLIAM SMELLIE,

PRINTER.

Dumfries, 22nd January, 1792.

I sit down, my dear Sir, to introduce a young lady to you, and a lady in the first ranks of fashion, too. What a task! to you—who care no more for the herd of animals called young ladies, than you do for the herd of animals called young gentlemen. To you—who despise and detest the groupings and combinations of fashion, as an idiot painter that seems industrious to place staring fools and unprincipled knaves in the foreground of his picture, while men of sense and honesty are too often thrown in the dimmest shades. Mrs. Riddel, who will take this letter to town with her, and send it to you, is a character that, even in your own way, as a naturalist and a philosopher, would be an acquisition to your acquaintance. The lady, too, is a votary to the muses; and as I think myself somewhat of a judge in my own trade, I assure you that her verses, always correct, and often elegant, are much beyond the common run of the *lady-poetesses*

of the day. She is a great admirer of your book; and, hearing me say that I was acquainted with you, she begged to be known to you, as she is just going to pay her first visit to our Caledonian capital. I told her that her best way was, to desire her near relation, and your intimate friend, Craigdarroch, to have you at his house while she was there; and lest you might think of a lively West Indian girl of eighteen, as girls of eighteen too often deserve to be thought of, I should take care to remove that prejudice. To be impartial, however, in appreciating the lady's merits, she has one unlucky failing: a failing which you will easily discover, as she seems rather pleased with indulging in it; and a failing that you will easily pardon, as it is a sin which very much besets yourself;—where she dislikes, or despises, she is apt to make no more a secret of it, than where she esteems and respects.

I will not present you with the unmeaning *compliments of the season*, but I will send you my warmest wishes and most ardent prayers, that FORTUNE may never throw your SUBSISTENCE to the mercy of a KNAVE, or set your CHARACTER on the judgment of a FOOL; but, that upright and erect, you may walk to an honest grave, where men of letters shall say, here lies a man who did honour to science, and men of worth shall say, here lies a man who did honour to human nature.

R. B.

[This letter introduces Mrs. Riddel to a gentleman who has been already mentioned both in verse and prose. William Smellie was the son of a mason in Edinburgh, and served an apprenticeship to learn the art of printing with Hamilton and Balfour. The hours of remission from labour—too often squandered—were employed by Smellie in acquiring knowledge, and he attended some of the University classes with such success, that he was enabled to put forth that edition of Terence which gained the prize offered by the Philosophical Society. He aided too in the composition of Buchan's Domestic Medicine: wrote the chief articles in the first edition of the Encyclopædia Britannica: aided Gilbert Stuart in editing the Edinburgh Magazine and Review, which perished because of the satiric and acrimonious spirit of the said Gilbert, and translated Buffon's Natural History. But the work through which his name will likely be remembered, is the Philosophy of Natural History, the first volume of which was published in 1790: he died June 24th, 1795, leaving a name of no common eminence as a naturalist. There are, however, levities in his writings which might have been spared. Ed.]

No. CCII.

TO MR. W. NICOL.

20th February, 1792.

O THOU, wisest among the wise, meridian blaze of prudence, full moon of discretion, and chief of many counsellors! How infinitely is thy puddle-headed, rattle-headed, wrong-headed, round-headed slave indebted to thy super-eminent goodness, that from the luminous path of thy own right-lined rectitude, thou lookest benignly down on an erring wretch, of whom the zig-zag wanderings defy all the powers of calculation, from the simple copulation of units, up to the hidden mysteries of fluxions! May one feeble ray of that light of wisdom which darts from thy sensorium, strait as the arrow of heaven, and bright as the meteor of inspiration, may it be my portion, so that I may be less unworthy of the face and favour of that father of proverbs and master of maxims, that antipode of folly, and magnet among the sages, the wise and witty Willie Nicol! Amen! Amen! Yea, so be it!

For me! I am a beast, a reptile, and know nothing! From the cave of my ignorance, amid the fogs of my dulness, and pestilential fumes of my political heresies, I look up to thee, as doth a toad through the iron-barred lucerne of a pestiferous dungeon, to the cloudless glory of a sum-

mer sun! * Sorely sighing in bitterness of soul, I say, when shall my name be the quotation of the wise, and my countenance be the delight of the godly, like the illustrious lord of Laggan's many hills? As for him, his works are perfect: never did the pen of calumny blur the fair page of his reputation, nor the bolt of hatred fly at his dwelling.

Thou mirror of purity, when shall the elfine lamp of my glimmerous understanding, purged from sensual appetites and gross desires, shine like the constellation of thy intellectual powers.—As for thee, thy thoughts are pure, and thy lips are holy. Never did the unhallowed breath of the powers of darkness, and the pleasures of darkness, pollute the sacred flame of thy sky-descended and heaven-bound desires: never did the vapours of impurity stain the unclouded serene of thy cerulean imagination. O that like thine were the tenor of my life, like thine the tenor of my conversation! then should no friend fear for my strength, no enemy rejoice in my weakness! Then should I lie down and rise up, and none to make me afraid.—May thy pity and thy prayer be exercised for, O thou lamp of wisdom and mirror of morality! thy devoted slave. R. B.

[This strain of irony was occasioned by a letter from Mr. Nicol, containing good advice. The poet seems to have been reading the love-letter written by the schoolmaster at the request of Mr. Thomas Pipes. Ed.]

No. CCIII.

TO FRANCIS GROSE, Esq. F.S.A.

Dumfries, 1792.

Sir,

I believe among all our Scots literati you have not met with professor Dugald Stewart, who fills the moral philosophy chair in the University of Edinburgh. To say that he is a man of the first parts, and what is more, a man of the first worth, to a gentleman of your general acquaintance, and who so much enjoys the luxury of unencumbered freedom and undisturbed privacy, is not perhaps recommendation enough:—but when I inform you that Mr. Stewart's principal characteristic is your favourite feature; *that* sterling independence of mind, which, though every man's right, so few men have the courage to claim, and fewer still the magnanimity to support:—When I tell you, that unseduced by splendour, and undisgusted by wretchedness, he appreciates the merits of the various actors in the great drama of life, merely as they perform their parts—in short, he is a man after your own heart, and I comply with his earnest

request in letting you know that he wishes above all things to meet with you. His house, Catrine, is within less than a mile of Sorn Castle, which you proposed visiting; or if you would transmit him the enclosed, he would with the greatest pleasure meet you anywhere in the neighbourhood. I write to Ayrshire to inform Mr. Stewart that I have acquitted myself of my promise. Should your time and spirits permit your meeting with Mr. Stewart, 'tis well; if not, I hope you will forgive this liberty, and I have at least an opportunity of assuring you with what truth and respect,

I am, Sir,

Your great admirer,

And very humble servant,

R. B.

No. CCIV.

TO THE SAME

Dumfries, 1792.

Among the many witch stories I have heard, relating to Alloway kirk, I distinctly remember only two or three.

Upon a stormy night, amid whistling squalls of wind, and bitter blasts of hail; in short, on such a night as the devil would chuse to take the air in; a farmer or farmer's servant was plodding and plashing homeward with his plough-irons on his shoulder, having been getting some repairs on them at a neighbouring smithy. His way lay by the kirk of Alloway, and being rather on the anxious look out in approaching a place so well known to be a favourite haunt of the devil and the devil's friends and emissaries, he was struck aghast by discovering through the horrors of the storm and stormy night, a light, which on his nearer approach plainly shewed itself to proceed from the haunted edifice. Whether he had been fortified from above on his devout supplication, as is customary with people when they suspect the immediate presence of Satan; or whether, accord-

ing to another custom, he had got courageously drunk at the smithy, I will not pretend to determine; but so it was that he ventured to go up to, nay into the very kirk. As luck would have it his temerity came off unpunished.

The members of the infernal junto were all out on some midnight business or other, and he saw nothing but a kind of kettle or caldron, depending from the roof, over the fire, simmering some heads of unchristened children, limbs of executed malefactors, &c. for the business of the night.—It was, in for a penny, in for a pound, with the honest ploughman: so without ceremony he unhooked the caldron from off the fire, and pouring out the damnable ingredients, inverted it on his head, and carried it fairly home, where it remained long in the family, a living evidence of the truth of the story.

Another story, which I can prove to be equally authentic, was as follows:

On a market day in the town of Ayr, a farmer from Carrick, and consequently whose way lay by the very gate of Alloway kirk-yard, in order to cross the river Doon at the old bridge, which is about two or three hundred yards farther on than the said gate, had been detained by his business, till by the time he reached Alloway it was the wizard hour, between night and morning.

Though he was terrified with a blaze streaming from the kirk, yet it is a well-known fact

that to turn back on these occasions is running by far the greatest risk of mischief, he prudently advanced on his road. When he had reached the gate of the kirk-yard, he was surprised and entertained, through the ribs and arches of an old gothic window, which still faces the highway, to see a dance of witches merrily footing it round their old sooty blackguard master, who was keeping them all alive with the power of his bag-pipe. The farmer stopping his horse to observe them a little, could plainly descry the faces of many old women of his acquaintance and neighbourhood. How the gentleman was dressed tradition does not say; but that the ladies were all in their smocks: and one of them happening unluckily to have a smock which was considerably too short to answer all the purpose of that piece of dress, our farmer was so tickled, that he involuntarily burst out, with a loud laugh, "Weel luppen, Maggy wi' the short sark!" and recollecting himself, instantly spurred his horse to the top of his speed. I need not mention the universally known fact, that no diabolical power can pursue you beyond the middle of a running stream. Lucky it was for the poor farmer that the river Doon was so near, for notwithstanding the speed of his horse, which was a good one, against he reached the middle of the arch of the bridge, and consequently the middle of the stream, the pursuing, vengeful hags, were so close at his heels, that one of them

actually sprung to seize him; but it was too late, nothing was on her side of the stream but the horse's tail, which immediately gave way at her infernal grip, as if blasted by a stroke of lightning; but the farmer was beyond her reach. However, the unsightly, tail-less, condition of the vigorous steed was to the last hour of the noble creature's life, an awful warning to the Carrick farmers, not to stay too late in Ayr markets.

The last relation I shall give, though equally true, is not so well identified as the two former, with regard to the scene; but as the best authorities give it for Alloway, I shall relate it.

On a summer's evening, about the time that nature puts on her sables to mourn the expiry of the cheerful day, a shepherd boy, belonging to a farmer in the immediate neighbourhood of Alloway Kirk, had just folded his charge, and was returning home. As he passed the kirk, in the adjoining field, he fell in with a crew of men and women, who were busy pulling stems of the plant Ragwort. He observed that as each person pulled a Ragwort, he or she got astride of it, and called out, "up horsie!" on which the Ragwort flew off, like Pegasus, through the air with its rider. The foolish boy likewise pulled his Ragwort, and cried with the rest, "up horsie!" and, strange to tell, away he flew with the company. The first stage at which the cavalcade stopt, was a merchant's wine cellar in Bourdeaux, where, without saying

by your leave, they quaffed away at the best the cellar could afford, until the morning, foe to the imps and works of darkness, threatened to throw light on the matter, and frightened them from their carousals.

The poor shepherd lad, being equally a stranger to the scene and the liquor, heedlessly got himself drunk; and when the rest took horse, he fell asleep, and was found so next day by some of the people belonging to the Merchant. Somebody that understood Scotch, asking him what he was, he said Such-a-one's herd in Alloway, and by some means or other getting home again, he lived long to tell the world the wondrous tale.

I am, &c. R. B.

[This letter was copied from the "Censura Literaria." It was communicated to Sir Egerton Brydges, the Editor of that work, by Mr. Gilchrist of Stamford, with the following remark.

"In a collection of miscellaneous papers of the Antiquary Grose, which I purchased a few years since, I found the following letter written to him by Burns, when the former was collecting the Antiquities of Scotland: When I premise it was on the second tradition that he afterwards formed the inimitable tale of 'Tam O'Shanter,' I cannot doubt of its being read with great interest. It were "burning day-light" to point out to a reader (and who is not a reader of Burns?) the thoughts he afterwards transplanted into the rhythmical narrative." Ed.]

No. CCV.

TO MR. J. CLARKE,

EDINBURGH.

July 16, 1792.

MR. BURNS begs leave to present his most respectful compliments to Mr. Clarke.—Mr. B. some time ago did himself the honour of writing Mr. C. respecting coming out to the country, to give a little musical instruction in a highly respectable family, where Mr. C. may have his own terms, and may be as happy as indolence, the Devil, and the gout, will permit him. Mr. B. knows well how Mr. C. is engaged with another family; but cannot Mr. C. find two or three weeks to spare to each of them? Mr. B. is deeply impressed with, and awfully conscious of, the high importance of Mr. C.'s time, whether in the winged moments of symphonious exhibition, at the keys of harmony, while listening seraphs cease their own less delightful strains; or in the drowsy arms of slumb'rous repose, in the arms of his dearly beloved elbow-chair, where the frowsy, but potent power of indolence, circumfuses her vapours round, and sheds her dews on the head of her darling son. But half a line conveying half a meaning from Mr. C. would make Mr. B. the happiest of mortals.

[The family to whom this letter refers was that of M'Murdo, then of Drumlanrig, now of Dumfries. The notes on the poet's songs have already intimated with what success the musician exerted his talents, and how Burns aided him by composing lyrics in honour of the charms of the family.—Ed.]

No. CCVI.

TO Mrs. DUNLOP.

Annan Water Foot, 22d August, 1792.

Do not blame me for it, Madam—my own conscience, hackneyed and weather-beaten as it is, in watching and reproving my vagaries, follies, indolence, &c. has continued to punish me sufficiently.

* * * * * * *

Do you think it possible, my dear and honoured friend, that I could be so lost to gratitude for many favours; to esteem for much worth, and to the honest, kind, pleasurable tie of, now old acquaintance, and I hope and am sure of progressive, increasing friendship—as for a single day, not to think of you—to ask the Fates what they are doing and about to do with my much loved friend and her

wide scattered connexions, and to beg of them to be as kind to you and yours as they possibly can?

Apropos! (though how it is apropos, I have not leisure to explain), Do you know that I am almost in love with an acquaintance of yours?—Almost! said I—I am in love, souse! over head and ears, deep as the most unfathomable abyss of the boundless ocean; but the word Love, owing to the *intermingledoms* of the good and the bad, the pure and the impure, in this world, being rather an equivocal term for expressing one's sentiments and sensations, I must do justice to the sacred purity of my attachment. Know, then, that the heart struck awe; the distant humble approach; the delight we should have in gazing upon and listening to a Messenger of Heaven, appearing in all the unspotted purity of his celestial home, among the coarse, polluted, far inferior sons of men, to deliver to them tidings that make their hearts swim in joy, and their imaginations soar in transport—such, so delighting and so pure, were the emotions of my soul on meeting the other day with Miss Lesley Baillie, your neighbour, at M——. Mr. B. with his two daughters, accompanied by Mr. H. of G., passing through Dumfries a few days ago, on their way to England, did me the honour of calling on me; on which I took my horse (though God knows I could ill spare the time), and accompanied them fourteen or fifteen miles, and dined and spent the day with them. 'Twas about nine, I think, when I left them, and,

riding home, I composed the following ballad, of which you will probably think you have a dear bargain, as it will cost you another groat of postage. You must know that there is an old ballad beginning with—

> "My bonnie Lizie Bailie
> I'll rowe thee in my plaidie," &c.

So I parodied it as follows, which is literally the first copy, "unanointed, unanneal'd;" as Hamlet says.—

> "O saw ye bonny Lesley
> As she gaed o'er the border?
> She's gane like Alexander,
> To spread her conquests farther."

See vol. v. page 19.

So much for ballads. I regret that you are gone to the east country, as I am to be in Ayrshire in about a fortnight. This world of ours, notwithstanding it has many good things in it, yet it has ever had this curse, that two or three people, who would be the happier the oftener they met together, are, almost without exception, always so placed as never to meet but once or twice a-year, which, considering the few years of a man's life, is a very great "evil under the sun," which I do not recollect that Solomon has mentioned in his catalogue of the miseries of man. I hope and believe that there is a state of existence beyond the grave, where the worthy of this life will renew their former intimacies, with this endearing addition, that, "we meet to part no more!"

"Tell us, ye dead,
Will none of you in pity disclose the secret
What 'tis you are and we must shortly be!"

A thousand times have I made this apostrophe to the departed sons of men, but not one of them has ever thought fit to answer the question. "O that some courteous ghost would blab it out!" but it cannot be; you and I, my friend, must make the experiment by ourselves, and for ourselves. However, I am so convinced that an unshaken faith in the doctrines of religion is not only necessary, by making us better men, but also by making us happier men, that I should take every care that your little godson, and every little creature that shall call me father, shall be taught them.

So ends this heterogeneous letter, written at this wild place of the world, in the intervals of my labour of discharging a vessel of rum from Antigua.

R. B.

No. CCVII.

TO MR. CUNNINGHAM.

Dumfries, 10th September, 1792.

No! I will not attempt an apology.—Amid all my hurry of business, grinding the faces of the publican and the sinner on the merciless wheels of the Excise; making ballads, and then drinking, and singing them; and, over and above all, the correcting the press-work of two different publications; still, still I might have stolen five minutes to dedicate to one of the first of my friends and fellow-creatures. I might have done, as I do at present, snatched an hour near "witching time of night," and scrawled a page or two. I might have congratulated my friend on his marriage; or I might have thanked the Caledonian archers for the honour they have done me, (though to do myself justice, I intended to have done both in rhyme, else I had done both long ere now). Well, then, here is to your good health! for you must know, I have set a nipperkin of toddy by me, just by way of spell, to keep away the meikle horned Deil, or any of his subaltern imps who may be on their nightly rounds.

But what shall I write to you?—"The voice said cry," and I said, "What shall I cry?"—O, thou spirit! whatever thou art, or wherever thou makest thyself visible! be thou a bogle by the eerie side of an auld thorn, in the dreary glen through which the herd-callan maun bicker in his gloamin route frae the faulde!—Be thou a brownie, set, at dead of night, to thy task by the blazing ingle, or in the solitary barn, where the repercussions of thy iron flail half affright thyself, as thou performest the work of twenty of the sons of men, ere the cock-crowing summon thee to thy ample cog of substantial brose. Be thou a kelpie, haunting the ford or ferry, in the starless night, mixing thy laughing yell with the howling of the storm and the roaring of the flood, as thou viewest the perils and miseries of man on the foundering horse, or in the tumbling boat!—Or, lastly, be thou a ghost, paying thy nocturnal visits to the hoary ruins of decayed grandeur; or performing thy mystic rites in the shadow of the time-worn church, while the moon looks, without a cloud, on the silent, ghastly dwellings of the dead around thee; or taking thy stand by the bedside of the villain, or the murderer, pourtraying on his dreaming fancy, pictures, dreadful as the horrours of unveiled hell, and terrible as the wrath of incensed Deity!—Come, thou spirit, but not in these horrid forms; come with the milder, gentle, easy inspirations, which thou breathest round the wig of a prating advocate, or the tête of a tea-sipping

gossip, while their tongues run at the light-horse gallop of clish-maclaver for ever and ever—come and assist a poor devil who is quite jaded in the attempt to share half an idea among half a hundred words; to fill up four quarto pages, while he has not got one single sentence of recollection, information, or remark worth putting pen to paper for.

I feel, I feel the presence of supernatural assistance! circled in the embrace of my elbow-chair, my breast labours, like the bloated Sybil on her three-footed stool, and like her too, labours with Nonsense.—Nonsense, auspicious name! Tutor, friend, and finger-post in the mystic mazes of law; the cadaverous paths of physic; and particularly in the sightless soarings of SCHOOL DIVINITY, who, leaving Common Sense confounded at his strength of pinion, Reason, delirious with eyeing his giddy flight; and Truth creeping back into the bottom of her well, cursing the hour that ever she offered her scorned alliance to the wizard power of Theologic Vision—raves abroad on all the winds. "On earth Discord! a gloomy Heaven above, opening her jealous gates to the nineteen thousandth part of the tithe of mankind! and below, an inescapable and inexorable hell, expanding its leviathan jaws for the vast residue of mortals!!!"—O doctrine! comfortable and healing to the weary, wounded soul of man! Ye sons and daughters of affliction, ye *pauvres miserables*, to whom day brings no pleasure, and night yields no rest, be comforted! "'Tis but

one to nineteen hundred thousand that your situation will mend in this world;" so alas, the experience of the poor and the needy too often affirms; and 'tis nineteen hundred thousand to *one*, by the dogmas of * * * * * * * *, that you will be damned eternally in the world to come!

But of all Nonsense, Religious Nonsense is the most nonsensical; so enough, and more than enough of it. Only, by the by, will you, or can you tell me, my dear Cunningham, why a sectarian turn of mind has always a tendency to narrow and illiberalize the heart? They are orderly; they may be just; nay, I have known them merciful: but still your children of sanctity move among their fellow-creatures with a nostril-snuffing putrescence, and a foot-spurning filth, in short, with a conceited dignity that your titled * * * * * * * * or any other of your Scottish Lordlings of seven centuries standing, display when they accidentally mix among the many-aproned sons of mechanical life. I remember, in my plough-boy days, I could not conceive it possible that a noble lord could be a fool, or a godly man could be a knave.—How ignorant are plough-boys!—Nay, I have since discovered that a *godly woman* may be a *****!—But hold—Here's t'ye again—this rum is generous Antigua, so a very unfit menstruum for scandal.

Apropos, how do you like, I mean *really* like, the married life? Ah, my friend! matrimony is quite a different thing from what your love-sick

youths and sighing girls take it to be! But marriage, we are told is appointed by God, and I shall never quarrel with any of his institutions. I am a husband of older standing than you, and shall give you *my* ideas of the conjugal state, (*en passant*: you know I am no Latinist, is not *conjugal* derived from *jugum*, a yoke?). Well then, the scale of good wifeship I divide into ten parts.—Goodnature, four; Good Sense, two; Wit, one; Personal Charms, viz. a sweet face, eloquent eyes, fine limbs, graceful carriage, (I would add a fine waist too, but that is so soon spoilt you know) all these, one; as for the other qualities belonging to, or attending on, a wife, such as Fortune, Connexions, Education, (I mean education extraordinary) Family blood, &c. divide the two remaining degrees among them as you please; only, remember that all these minor properties must be expressed by *fractions*, for there is not any one of them, in the aforesaid scale, entitled to the dignity of an *integer*.

As for the rest of my fancies and reveries—how I lately met with Miss Lesley Baillie, the most beautiful, elegant woman in the world—how I accompanied her and her father's family fifteen miles on their journey, out of pure devotion, to admire the loveliness of the works of God, in such an unequalled display of them—how, in galloping home at night, I made a ballad on her, of which these two stanzas make a part—

Thou, bonnie Lesley, art a queen,
  Thy subjects we before thee;
Thou, bonnie Lesley, art divine,
  The hearts o' men adore thee.

The very Deil he could na scathe
  Whatever wad belang thee!
He'd look into thy bonnie face
  And say, 'I canna wrang thee.'

—behold all these things are written in the chronicles of my imaginations, and shall be read by thee, my dear friend, and by thy beloved spouse, my other dear friend, at a more convenient season.

Now, to thee, and to thy before-designed *bosom*-companion, be given the precious things brought forth by the sun, and the precious things brought forth by the moon, and the benignest influences of the stars, and the living streams which flow from the fountains of life, and by the tree of life, for ever and ever! Amen!

R. B.

No. CCVIII.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Dumfries, 24th September, 1792.

I HAVE this moment, my dear Madam, yours of the twenty-third. All your other kind reproaches, your news, &c. are out of my head when I read and think on Mrs. H——'s situation. Good God! a heart-wounded helpless young woman — in a strange, foreign land, and that land convulsed with every horror that can harrow the human feelings—sick—looking, longing for a comforter, but finding none — a mother's feelings, too : — but it is too much : he who wounded (he only can) may He heal!

* * * * * *

I wish the farmer great joy of his new acquisition to his family. * * * * * * * I cannot say that I give him joy of his life as a farmer. 'Tis, as a farmer paying a dear, unconscionable rent, a *cursed life!* As to a laird farming his own property; sowing his own corn in hope; and reaping it, in spite of brittle weather, in gladness; knowing that none can say unto him, 'what dost thou?'—fattening his herds; shearing his flocks; rejoicing at

Christmas; and begetting sons and daughters, until he be the venerated, grey-haired leader of a little tribe—'tis a heavenly life! but Devil take the life of reaping the fruits that another must eat.

Well, your kind wishes will be gratified, as to seeing me when I make my Ayrshire visit. I cannot leave Mrs. B——, until her nine months race is run, which may perhaps be in three or four weeks. She, too, seems determined to make me the patriarchal leader of a band. However, if Heaven will be so obliging as to let me have them in the proportion of three boys to one girl, I shall be so much the more pleased. I hope, if I am spared with them, to shew a set of boys that will do honour to my cares and name; but I am not equal to the task of rearing girls. Besides, I am too poor; a girl should always have a fortune. Apropos, your little godson is thriving charmingly, but is a very devil. He, though two years younger, has completely mastered his brother. Robert is indeed the mildest, gentlest creature I ever saw. He has a most surprising memory, and is quite the pride of his schoolmaster.

You know how readily we get into prattle upon a subject dear to our heart: you can excuse it. God bless you and yours!

R. B.

No. CCIX.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Supposed to have been written on the Death of Mrs. H——, her Daughter.

I HAD been from home, and did not receive your letter until my return the other day. What shall I say to comfort you, my much-valued, much-afflicted friend! I can but grieve with you; consolation I have none to offer, except that which religion holds out to the children of affliction—*children of affliction!*—how just the expression! and like every other family, they have matters among them which they hear, see, and feel in a serious, all-important manner, of which the world has not, nor cares to have, any idea. The world looks indifferently on, makes the passing remark, and proceeds to the next novel occurrence.

Alas, Madam! who would wish for many years? What is it but to drag existence until our joys gradually expire, and leave us in a night of misery: like the gloom which blots out the stars one by one, from the face of night, and leaves us, without a ray of comfort, in the howling waste!

I am interrupted, and must leave off. You shall soon hear from me again. R. B.

No. CCX.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Dumfries, 6th December, 1792.

I SHALL be in Ayrshire, I think, next week; and, if at all possible, I shall certainly, my much esteemed friend have the pleasure of visiting at Dunlop-house.

Alas, Madam! how seldom do we meet in this world, that we have reason to congratulate ourselves on accessions of happiness! I have not passed half the ordinary term of an old man's life, and yet I scarcely look over the obituary of a newspaper, that I do not see some names that I have known, and which I, and other acquaintances, little thought to meet with there so soon. Every other instance of the mortality of our kind, makes us cast an anxious look into the dreadful abyss of uncertainty, and shudder with apprehension for our own fate. But of how different an importance are the lives of different individuals? Nay, of what importance is one period of the same life, more than another? A few years ago, I could have laid down in the dust, "careless of the voice of the

morning;" and now not a few, and these most helpless individuals, would, on losing me and my exertions, lose both their "staff and shield." By the way, these helpless ones have lately got an addition; Mrs. B—— having given me a fine girl since I wrote you. There is a charming passage in Thomson's "Edward and Eleanora:"

"The valiant, *in himself*, what can he suffer?
Or what need he regard his *single* woes?" &c.

As I am got in the way of quotations, I shall give you another from the same piece, peculiarly, alas! too peculiarly apposite, my dear Madam, to your present frame of mind:

"Who so unworthy but may proudly deck him
With his fair weather virtue, that exults
Glad o'er the summer main? the tempest comes,
The rough winds rage aloud, when from the helm
This virtue shrinks, and in a corner lies
Lamenting—Heavens! if privileged from trial
How cheap a thing were virtue!"

I do not remember to have heard you mention Thomson's dramas. I pick up favourite quotations, and store them in my mind as ready armour, offensive or defensive, amid the struggle of this turbulent existence. Of these is one, a very favourite one, from his "Alfred:"

"Attach thee firmly to the virtuous deeds
And offices of life; to life itself,
With all its vain and transient joys, sit loose."

Probably I have quoted some of these to you formerly, as indeed when I write from the heart, I am apt to be guilty of such repetitions. The com-

pass of the heart, in the musical style of expression, is much more bounded than that of the imagination; so the notes of the former are extremely apt to run into one another; but in return for the paucity of its compass, its few notes are much more sweet. I must still give you another quotation, which I am almost sure I have given you before, but I cannot resist the temptation. The subject is religion—speaking of its importance to mankind, the author says,

"'Tis this, my friend, that streaks our morning bright."

I see you are in for double postage so I shall e'en scribble out t'other sheet. We in this country here, have many alarms of the reforming, or rather the republican spirit, of your part of the kingdom. Indeed we are a good deal in commotion ourselves. For me, I am a placeman, you know; a very humble one indeed, Heaven knows, but still so much as to gag me. What my private sentiments are, you will find out without an interpreter.

* * * * *

I have taken up the subject, and the other day, for a pretty actress's benefit night, I wrote an address, which I will give on the other page, called "The Rights of Woman:"

"While Europe's eye is fixed on mighty things."

[*See vol.* iii. *page* 224.]

I shall have the honour of receiving your criticisms in person at Dunlop. R. B.

No. CCXI.

TO R. GRAHAM, Esq. FINTRAY.

December, 1792.

SIR,

I HAVE been surprised, confounded, and distracted by Mr. Mitchel, the collector, telling me that he has received an order from your Board to enquire into my political conduct, and blaming me as a person disaffected to government.

Sir, you are a husband — and a father. — You know what you would feel, to see the much-loved wife of your bosom, and your helpless, prattling little ones, turned adrift into the world, degraded and disgraced from a situation in which they had been respectable and respected, and left almost without the necessary support of a miserable existence. Alas, Sir! must I think that such, soon, will be my lot! and from the d-mn'd, dark insinuations of hellish groundless envy too! I believe, Sir, I may aver it, and in the sight of Omniscience, that I would not tell a deliberate falsehood, no, not though even worse horrors, if worse can be, than those I have mentioned, hung over my head; and I say, that the allegation, whatever villain has made it, is a lie! To the British Con-

stitution, on revolution principles, next after my God, I am most devoutly attached; you, Sir, have been much and generously my friend.—Heaven knows how warmly I have felt the obligation, and how gratefully I have thanked you.—Fortune, Sir, has made you powerful, and me impotent; has given you patronage, and me dependance.—I would not for my single self, call on your humanity; were such my insular, unconnected situation, I would despise the tear that now swells in my eye—I could brave misfortune, I could face ruin; for at the worst, "Death's thousand doors stand open;" but, good God! the tender concerns that I have mentioned, the claims and ties that I see at this moment, and feel around me, how they unnerve Courage, and wither Resolution! To your patronage, as a man of some genius, you have allowed me a claim; and your esteem, as an honest man, I know is my due: To these, Sir, permit me to appeal; by these may I adjure you to save me from that misery which threatens to overwhelm me, and which, with my latest breath I will say it, I have not deserved. R. B.

[Graham, of Fintray, stood the poet's friend in this hour of peril, and the Board had the generosity to permit him to continue to eat the "bitter bread" of his situation for the remainder of his life. Burns in his letter to Erskine, of Mar, enters fully into the history of this dark transaction. Ed.]

No. CCXII.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Dumfries, 31st December, 1792.

DEAR MADAM,

A HURRY of business, thrown in heaps by my absence, has until now prevented my returning my grateful acknowledgements to the good family of Dunlop, and you in particular, for that hospitable kindness which rendered the four days I spent under that genial roof, four of the pleasantest I ever enjoyed.—Alas, my dearest friend! how few and fleeting are those things we call pleasures! on my road to Ayrshire, I spent a night with a friend whom I much valued; a man whose days promised to be many; and on Saturday last we laid him in the dust!

Jan. 2, 1793.

I HAVE just received yours of the 30th, and feel much for your situation. However I heartily rejoice in your prospect of recovery from that vile jaundice. As to myself, I am better, though not quite free of my complaint.—You must not think, as you seem to insinuate, that in my way of life I

want exercise. Of that I have enough; but occasional hard drinking is the devil to me. Against this I have again and again bent my resolution, and have greatly succeeded. Taverns I have totally abandoned: it is the private parties in the family way, among the hard drinking gentlemen of this country, that do me the mischief—but even this, I have more than half given over.

Mr. Corbet can be of little service to me at present; at least I should be shy of applying. I cannot possibly be settled as a supervisor, for several years. I must wait the rotation of the list, and there are twenty names before mine.—I might indeed get a job of officiating, where a settled supervisor was ill, or aged; but that hauls me from my family, as I could not remove them on such an uncertainty. Besides, some envious, malicious devil, has raised a little demur on my political principles, and I wish to let that matter settle before I offer myself too much in the eye of my supervisors. I have set, henceforth, a seal on my lips, as to these unlucky politics; but to you, I must breathe my sentiments. In this, as in every thing else, I shall shew the undisguised emotions of my soul. War I deprecate: misery and ruin to thousands, are in the blast that announces the destructive demon. R. B.

["The following extract," says Cromek, "from letter addressed by Robert Bloomfield to the Earl of

Buchan, contains so interesting an exhibition of the modesty inherent in real worth, and so philosophical, and at the same time so poetical an estimate of the different characters and destinies of Burns and its author, that I should esteem myself culpable were I to withhold it from the public view.

'The illustrious soul that has left amongst us the name of Burns, has often been lowered down to a comparison with me; but the comparison exists more in circumstances than in essentials. That man stood up with the stamp of superior intellect on his brow; a visible greatness: and great and patriotic subjects would only have called into action the powers of his mind, which lay inactive while he played calmly and exquisitely the pastoral pipe.

'The letters to which I have alluded in my preface to the "Rural Tales," were friendly warnings, pointed with immediate reference to the fate of that extraordinary man. "Remember Burns," has been the watchword of my friends. I do remember Burns; but I *am not* Burns! neither have I his fire to fan or to quench; nor his passions to controul! Where then is my merit if I make a peaceful voyage on a smooth sea, and with no mutiny on board? To a lady (I have it from herself), who remonstrated with him on his danger from drink, and the pursuits of some of his associates, he replied, "Madam, they would not thank me for my company, if I did not drink with them.—I *must* give them a slice of my constitution." How much to be regretted that he did not give them thinner slices of his constitution, that it might have lasted longer.' ED.]

No. CCXIII.

TO Mr. CUNNINGHAM.

3d March, 1793.

Since I wrote to you the last lugubrious sheet, I have not had time to write you farther. When I say that I had not time, that, as usual, means, that the three demons, indolence, business, and ennui, have so completely shared my hours among them, as not to leave me a five minutes' fragment to take up a pen in.

Thank heaven, I feel my spirits buoying upwards with the renovating year. Now I shall in good earnest take up Thomson's songs. I dare say he thinks I have used him unkindly, and I must own with too much appearance of truth. Apropos, do you know the much admired old Highland air called "the Sutor's Dochter?" It is a first-rate favourite of mine, and I have written what I reckon one of my best songs to it. I will send it to you as it was sung with great applause in some fashionable circles by Major Robertson, of Lude, who was here with his corps.

* * * * * *

There is one commission that I must trouble

you with. I lately lost a valuable seal, a present from a departed friend, which vexes me much.

I have gotten one of your Highland pebbles, which I fancy would make a very decent one; and I want to cut my armorial bearing on it; will you be so obliging as inquire what will be the expense of such a business? I do not know that my name is matriculated, as the heralds call it, at all; but I have invented arms for myself, so you know I shall be chief of the name; and, by courtesy of Scotland, will likewise be entitled to supporters. These, however, I do not intend having on my seal. I am a bit of a herald, and shall give you, *secundum artem*, my arms. On a field, azure, a holly bush, seeded, proper, in base; a shepherd's pipe and crook, saltier-wise, also proper, in chief. On a wreath of the colours, a wood-lark perching on a sprig of bay-tree, proper, for crest. Two mottoes; round the top of the crest, *Wood notes wild*; at the bottom of the shield, in the usual place, *Better a wee bush than nae bield.* By the shepherd's pipe and crook I do not mean the nonsense of painters of Arcadia, but a *Stock and Horn*, and a *Club*, such as you see at the head of Allan Ramsay, in Allan's quarto edition of the *Gentle Shepherd.* By the by, do you know Allan? He must be a man of very great genius—Why is he not more known?—Has he no patrons? or do "Poverty's cold wind and crushing rain beat keen and heavy" on him? I once, and but once, got a glance of that noble

edition of the noblest pastoral in the world; and dear as it was, I mean, dear as to my pocket, I would have bought it; but I was told that it was printed and engraved for subscribers only. He is the *only* artist who has hit *genuine* pastoral *costume*. What, my dear Cunningham, is there in riches, that they narrow and harden the heart so? I think, that were I as rich as the sun, I should be as generous as the day; but as I have no reason to imagine my soul a nobler one than any other man's, I must conclude that wealth imparts a bird-lime quality to the possessor, at which the man, in his native poverty, would have revolted. What has led me to this, is the idea of such merit as Mr. Allan possesses, and such riches as a nabob or government contractor possesses, and why they do not form a mutual league. Let wealth shelter and cherish unprotected merit, and the gratitude and celebrity of that merit will richly repay it.

R. B.

[The seal with the arms which the ingenious poet invented for his house was carefully cut in Edinburgh and hung at his watch for several years. It is still in the family and regarded as a relique.

That Burns admired such a painter as Allan was to be expected: they both wrought on nature of Scottish growth, and both excelled in pictures of humour and glee. "As an artist, however, Allan's merits are of a limited nature; he neither excelled in fine drawing nor in harmonious colouring, and grace and grandeur were

beyond his reach. He painted portraits, which are chiefly remarkable for a strong homely resemblance: he painted landscapes, but these want light and air, and he attempted the historical, but save in one picture, 'The Corinthian Maid,' all his efforts in that way were failures. His genius lay in expression, especially in grave humour and open drollery. Yet it would be difficult perhaps to name one of his pictures where nature is not overcharged: he could not stop his hand till he had driven his subject into the debatable land that lies between truth and caricature. He is among painters, what Allan Ramsay is among poets, a fellow of infinite humour, and excelling in all manner of rustic drollery, but deficient in fine sensibility of conception, and little acquainted with lofty emotion or high imagination."

To the above brief character which I wrote for the Lives of the British Artists, in Murray's Family Library, may be added, from the same source, that Allan was born at Alloa, in Stirlingshire; studied in Glasgow and at Rome; returned to his native land, became Master of the Edinburgh Academy, and died there 6th August, 1796, in the fifty-third year of his age. In person he was under the middle size, his form slender, his face coarse and long, and his hair of the colour of sand. His looks were mean and unpromising, till he was in company to his liking, when his large gray eyes grew bright and penetrating, his manners pleasing, and his conversation sprightly and humourous, inclining to satire, and replete with observation and anecdote. Ed.]

No. CCXIV.

TO Miss BENSON,

NOW MRS. BASIL MONTAGU.

Dumfries, 21*st March*, 1793.

MADAM,

Among many things for which I envy those hale, long-lived old fellows before the flood, is this in particular, that when they met with any body after their own heart, they had a charming long prospect of many, many happy meetings with them in after-life.

Now, in this short, stormy, winter day of our fleeting existence, when you now and then, in the Chapter of Accidents, meet an individual whose acquaintance is a real acquisition, there are all the probabilities against you, that you shall never meet with that valued character more. On the other hand, brief as this miserable being is, it is none of the least of the miseries belonging to it, that if there is any miscreant whom you hate, or creature whom you despise, the ill-run of the chances shall be so against you, that in the over-

takings, turnings, and jostlings of life, pop, at some unlucky corner, eternally comes the wretch upon you, and will not allow your indignation or contempt a moment's repose. As I am a sturdy believer in the powers of darkness, I take these to be the doings of that old author of mischief, the devil. It is well-known that he has some kind of short-hand way of taking down our thoughts, and I make no doubt that he is perfectly acquainted with my sentiments respecting Miss Benson: how much I admired her abilities and valued her worth, and how very fortunate I thought myself in her acquaintance. For this last reason, my dear Madam, I must entertain no hopes of the very great pleasure of meeting with you again.

Miss Hamilton tells me that she is sending a packet to you, and I beg leave to send you the enclosed sonnet, though, to tell you the real truth, the sonnet is a mere pretence, that I may have the opportunity of declaring with how much respectful esteem I have the honour to be, &c.

R. B.

No. CCXV.

TO PATRICK MILLER, Esq.

OF DALSWINTON.

Dumfries, April 1793.

Sir,

My poems having just come out in another edition, will you do me the honour to accept of a copy? A mark of my gratitude to you, as a gentleman to whose goodness I have been much indebted; of my respect for you, as a patriot who, in a venal, sliding age, stands forth the champion of the liberties of my country; and of my veneration for you, as a man, whose benevolence of heart does honour to human nature.

There *was* a time, Sir, when I was your dependant: this language *then* would have been like the vile incense of flattery—I could not have used it.—Now that connexion is at an end, do me the honour to accept of this *honest* tribute of respect from, Sir,

Your much indebted humble servant,

R. B.

[The time to which Burns alludes was when he held the farm of Ellisland as tenant to Mr. Miller. Between

the laird and the farmer there passed no stern words respecting the relinquishing of the lease—but it occasioned a coldness which continued till the death of the latter. At the burial of the Bard, the eyes of Miller were wet when many around were dry. Ed.]

No. CCXVI.

TO JOHN FRANCIS ERSKINE, Esq.

OF MAR.

Dumfries, 13*th April*, 1793.

Sir,

Degenerate as human nature is said to be; and in many instances, worthless and unprincipled it is; still there are bright examples to the contrary: examples that even in the eyes of superior beings, must shed a lustre on the name of Man.

Such an example have I now before me, when you, Sir, came forward to patronise and befriend a distant obscure stranger, merely because poverty had made him helpless, and his British hardihood of mind had provoked the arbitrary wantonness of power. My much esteemed friend, Mr. Riddel of

Glenriddel, has just read me a paragraph of a letter he had from you. Accept, Sir, of the silent throb of gratitude; for words would but mock the emotions of my soul.

You have been misinformed as to my final dismission from the Excise; I am still in the service. —Indeed, but for the exertions of a gentleman who must be known to you, Mr. Graham of Fintray, a gentleman who has ever been my warm and generous friend, I had, without so much as a hearing, or the slightest previous intimation, been turned adrift, with my helpless family, to all the horrours of want.—Had I had any other resource, probably I might have saved them the trouble of a dismission; but the little money I gained by my publication, is almost every guinea embarked, to save from ruin an only brother, who, though one of the worthiest, is by no means one of the most fortunate of men.

In my defence to their accusations, I said, 'that whatever might be my sentiments of republics, ancient or modern, as to Britain, I abjured the idea?—That a CONSTITUTION, which, in its original principles, experience had proved to be every way fitted for our happiness in society, it would be insanity to sacrifice to an untried visionary theory: —That, in consideration of my being situated in a department, however humble, immediately in the hands of people in power, I had forborne taking any active part, either personally, or as an author, in

the present business of REFORM. But that, where I must declare my sentiments, I would say there existed a system of corruption between the executive power and the representative part of the legislature, which boded no good to our glorious CONSTITUTION; and which every patriotic Briton must wish to see amended.—Some such sentiments as these, I stated in a letter to my generous patron Mr. Graham, which he laid before the Board at large; where, it seems, my last remark gave great offence; and one of our supervisors general, a Mr. Corbet, was instructed to inquire on the spot, and to document me—"that my business was to act, *not to think*; and that whatever might be men or measures, it was for me to be *silent* and *obedient*."

Mr. Corbet was likewise my steady friend; so between Mr. Graham and him, I have been partly forgiven; only I understand that all hopes of my getting officially forward, are blasted.

Now, Sir, to the business in which I would more immediately interest you. The partiality of my COUNTRYMEN has brought me forward as a man of genius, and has given me a character to support. In the POET I have avowed manly and independent sentiments, which I trust will be found in the MAN. Reasons of no less weight than the support of a wife and family, have pointed out as the eligible, and situated as I was, the only eligible line of life for me, my present occupation.

Still my honest fame is my dearest concern; and a thousand times have I trembled at the idea of those *degrading* epithets that malice or misrepresentation may affix to my fame. I have often, in blasting anticipation, listened to some future hackney scribbler, with the heavy malice of savage stupidity, exulting in his hireling paragraphs—"BURNS, notwithstanding the *fanfaronade* of independence to be found in his works, and after having been held forth to public view, and to public estimation as a man of some genius, yet, quite destitute of resources within himself to support his borrowed dignity, he dwindled into a paltry exciseman, and slunk out the rest of his insignificant existence in the meanest of pursuits, and among the vilest of mankind."

In your illustrious hands, Sir, permit me to lodge my disavowal and defiance of these slanderous falsehoods. BURNS was a poor man from birth, and an exciseman by necessity: but—I *will* say it! the sterling of his honest worth, no poverty could debase, and his independent British mind, oppression might bend, but could not subdue. Have not I, to me, a more precious stake in my Country's welfare, than the richest dukedom in it?—I have a large family of children, and the prospect of many more. I have three sons, who I see already, have brought into the world souls ill qualified to inhabit the bodies of SLAVES.—Can I look tamely on, and see any machination to

wrest from them the birthright of my boys,—the little independent BRITONS, in whose veins runs my own blood?—No! I will not! should my heart's blood stream around my attempt to defend it!

Does any man tell me, that my full efforts can be of no service; and that it does not belong to my humble station to meddle with the concern of a nation?

I can tell him, that it is on such individuals as I, that a nation has to rest, both for the hand of support, and the eye of intelligence. The uninform'd MOB may swell a nation's bulk; and the titled, tinsel, courtly throng, may be its feathered ornament; but the number of those who are elevated enough in life to reason and to reflect; yet low enough to keep clear of the venal contagion of a court!—these are a nation's strength.

I know not how to apologize for the impertinent length of this epistle; but one small request I must ask of you farther—When you have honoured this letter with a perusal, please to commit it to the flames. BURNS, in whose behalf you have so generously interested yourself, I have here, in his native colours drawn *as he is*; but should any of the people in whose hands is the very bread he eats, get the least knowledge of the picture, *it would ruin the poor* BARD *for ever!*

My poems having just come out in another edition, I beg leave to present you with a copy

as a small mark of that high esteem and ardent gratitude, with which I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your deeply indebted,

And ever devoted humble servant,

R. B.

[Erskine of Mar gave a copy of the poet's letter to Cromek, who published it in the "Reliques:" It was rumoured that Burns was not only admonished by the Board of Excise but actually dismissed from his situation: this induced Erskine to propose a subscription in his favour, which was refused by the bard with that elevation of sentiment which characterized his mind. It was well that the future Earl of Mar heard the report, since it drew from Burns this truly manly and well considered letter—it was all but the latest act of his life to write it down from his memory among his memoranda. And yet men are not wanting who impeach the accuracy of the poet: of these the chief is Mr. Findlater, his superior officer in Dumfries at the time. That gentleman eulogizes the conduct of the Board of Excise: avers that the bard received only a gentle—a courteous admonition, and was never for a moment in danger of being dismissed. He has fairly given the lie to the poet, and the question is, to whose statement are we to attach credit. Burns informs Graham that Mitchell had confounded him with the information, that he had received orders to inquire into his political conduct, for he was blamed as a person disaffected to the government. Does Mr. Findlater deny that the collector was so com-

missioned? In the present letter the poet farther says, that but for the interposition of Graham of Fintray, he would have been turned adrift with his helpless family to all the horrors of want; and moreover that he was documented by the Board, that his business was to act not to think, and that whatever might be men and measures, it was his duty to be silent and obedient.

Those who contradict the testimony of Burns should do it on better authority than their own assertion: the poet's word will weigh down any other man's, so long as he speaks from his own knowledge. Findlater argues, Burns states facts. The poet is supported by the testimony of Robert Ainslie, to whom all his affairs were known: in a letter to the editor, dated 3rd September, 1834, without being aware that his illustrious friend's assertions were impeached, he says, "You know that the poet was a 'friend of the people' during the days of political ferment in his time: a circumstance which impeded his advancement in the excise—he never rose higher than the 'nicked stick,' the badge and implement of a common gauger. The Commissioners of Excise, irritated at his opinions, wrote him a formal official letter, sealing with the large seal of office, informing him that a 'petty officer' had 'no business with politics.'" The proud heart of Burns did not like this humbling: after a few wrathful words in secret to one of his friends, he took a pencil and wrote these lines on the envelope:

"In politics if you would mix,
And low your station be,
Keep this in mind—be deaf and blind,
Let great folks hear and see."

ED.]

No. CCXVII.

TO MR ROBERT AINSLIE.

April, 26, 1793.

I AM d-n-nably out of humour, my dear Ainslie, and that is the reason, why I take up the pen to *you* · 'tis the nearest way (*probatum est*), to recover my spirits again,

I received your last, and was much entertained with it, but I will not at this time, nor at any other time, answer it,—Answer a letter? I never could answer a letter in my life!—I have written many a letter in return for letters I have received; but then—they were original matter—spurt-away! zig, here; zag, there, as if the Devil that, my Grannie (an old woman indeed) often told me, rode on will-o'-wisp, or, in her more classic phrase, SPUNKIE, were looking over my elbow.—Happy thought that idea has engendered in my head! SPUNKIE—thou shalt henceforth be my symbol, signature, and tutelary genius! Like thee, hap-step-and-lowp, here-awa-there-awa, higglety-pigglety, pell-mell, hither-and-yon, ram-stam, happy-go-lucky, up tails-a'-by-the light-o'the-moon; has been, is, and shall be, my progress through the mosses and

moors of this vile, bleak, barren wilderness of a life of ours.

Come then, my guardian spirit! like thee, may I skip away, amusing myself by and at my own light: and if any opaque-souled lubber of mankind complain that my elfine, lambent, glimmerous wanderings have misled his stupid steps over precipices, or into bogs, let the thick-headed Blunderbuss recollect, that he is not SPUNKIE:—that

> SPUNKIE's wanderings could not copied be;
> Amid these perils none durst walk but he—

I have no doubt but scholarcraft may be as a Scotsman catches the itch,—by friction. How else can you account for it, that born blockheads, by mere dint of *handling* books, grow so wise that even they themselves are equally convinced of and surprised at their own parts? I once carried this philosophy to that degree that in a knot of country folks who had a library amongst them, and who, to the honour of their good sense, made me factotum in the business; one of our members, a little, wise-looking, squat, upright, jabbering body of a tailor, I advised him, instead of turning over the leaves, *to bind the book on his back.*—Johnie took the hint; and as our meetings were every fourth Saturday, and Pricklouse having a good Scots mile to walk in coming, and, of course, another in returning, Bodkin was sure to lay his hand on some heavy

quarto, or ponderous folio, with, and under which, wrapt up in his grey plaid, he grew wise, as he grew weary, all the way home. He carried this so far, that an old musty Hebrew concordance, which we had in a present from a neighbouring priest, by mere dint of applying it, as doctors do a blistering plaster, between his shoulders, Stitch, in a dozen pilgrimages, acquired as much rational theology as the said priest had done by forty years perusal of the pages

Tell me, and tell me truly, what you think of this theory.

Yours,

SPUNKIE.

No. CCXVIII.

TO MISS KENNEDY.

MADAM,

PERMIT me to present you with the enclosed song as a small though grateful tribute for the honour of your acquaintance. I have, in these verses, attempted some faint sketches of your portrait in the unembellished simple manner of descriptive TRUTH.—Flattery, I leave to your LOVERS, whose exaggerating fancies may make them imagine you still nearer perfection than you really are.

Poets, Madam, of all mankind, feel most forcibly the powers of BEAUTY; as, if they are really POETS of nature's making, their feelings must be finer, and their taste more delicate than most of the world. In the cheerful bloom of SPRING, or the pensive mildness of AUTUMN; the grandeur of SUMMER, or the hoary majesty of WINTER; the poet feels a charm unknown to the rest of his species. Even the sight of a fine flower, or the company of a fine woman (by far the finest part of God's works below), have sensations for the poetic heart that the HERD of man are strangers to.—On this last account, Madam, I am, as in many other things,

indebted to Mr. Hamilton's kindness in introducing me to you. Your lovers may view you with a wish, I look on you with pleasure, their hearts, in your presence, may glow with desire, mine rises with admiration.

That the arrows of misfortune, however they should, as incident to humanity, glance a slight wound, may never reach your *heart*—that the snares of villany may never beset you in the road of life—that INNOCENCE may hand you by the path of HONOUR to the dwelling of PEACE, is the sincere wish of him who has the honour to be, &c.

R. B.

[The poet has been called the flatterer of woman, but there is perhaps little flattery in saying that a beauteous creature is beautiful. The song addressed to the young lady has not been named. Miss Kennedy claimed relationship with the Hamiltons of Mossgiel. ED.]

No. CCXIX.

TO MISS CRAIK.

Dumfries, August, 1793.

MADAM,

SOME rather unlooked-for accidents have prevented my doing myself the honour of a second visit to Arbigland, as I was so hospitably invited, and so positively meant to have done.—However, I still hope to have that pleasure before the busy months of harvest begin.

I enclose you two of my late pieces, as some kind of return for the pleasure I have received in perusing a certain MS. volume of poems in the possession of Captain Riddel. To repay one with an *old song*, is a proverb, whose force, you, Madam, I know, will not allow. What is said of illustrious descent is, I believe, equally true of a talent for poetry, none ever despised it who had pretensions to it. The fates and characters of the rhyming tribe often employ my thoughts when I am disposed to be melancholy. There is not, among all the martyrologies that ever were penned, so rueful a narrative as the lives of the poets.—In the comparative view of wretches, the criterion is not what they are doomed to suffer, but how they are formed to bear. Take a being of our kind, give him a

stronger imagination and a more delicate sensibility, which between them will ever engender a more ungovernable set of passions than are the usual lot of man; implant in him an irresistible impulse to some idle vagary, such as arranging wild flowers in fantastical nosegays, tracing the grasshopper to his haunt by his chirping song, watching the frisks of the little minnows in the sunny pool, or hunting after the intrigues of butterflies—in short, send him adrift after some pursuit which shall eternally mislead him from the paths of lucre, and yet curse him with a keener relish than any man living for the pleasures that lucre can purchase; lastly, fill up the measure of his woes by bestowing on him a spurning sense of his own dignity, and you have created a wight nearly as miserable as a poet. To you, Madam, I need not recount the fairy pleasures the muse bestows to counterbalance this catalogue of evils. Bewitching poetry is like bewitching woman; she has in all ages been accused of misleading mankind from the councils of wisdom and the paths of prudence, involving them in difficulties, baiting them with poverty, branding them with infamy, and plunging them in the whirling vortex of ruin; yet, where is the man but must own that all our happiness on earth is not worthy the name—that even the holy hermit's solitary prospect of paradisiacal bliss is but the glitter of a northern sun rising over a frozen region, compared with the many pleasures the nameless raptures that we owe to the lovely Queen of the heart of Man! R. B.

[Miss Helen Craik of Arbigland had merit both as a poetess and novelist: her ballads may be compared with those of Macneill, and her novels, amid much graphic force, had a seasoning of the satiric, which rendered them acceptable to all who understood their allusions. She died some years ago at Allonby: she was much of an enthusiast, and lived estranged from her family for a long period of her life. Her father was one of the wisest gentlemen and most sensible improvers of property on the Scottish side of the Solway: his taste, too, in architecture was of a pure kind: he lived to a good old age, and had the misfortune to witness with his own eyes the melancholy death of his only son. The heir of Arbigland, accompanied by some sixteen young men of the parish, set off one summer morning in his pleasure-skiff to pay a visit to the English shore: when more than half-way over the Solway, a whirlwind suddenly arose, seized the sails, whirled the skiff around, and down it went with all on board—though a vessel was near, not a soul was saved. The wretched father saw all this from a seat on the top of the house: after the skiff sank he sat still for an hour, looking fixedly, it is said, on the sea. Arbigland is now the property of his grandson, Douglas Hamilton Craik, Esq. The situation on the Solway side is beautiful: the house is a model of proportion and elegant workmanship: the woods, which partly enclose it, are very lofty, and some of the firs of the spruce tribe are of enormous girth. Burns was a frequent visitor here: nor has the ancient hospitality of the house of Craik declined, nor its love of literature.—Ed.]

No CCXX

TO LADY GLENCAIRN.

My Lady,

The honour you have done your poor poet, in writing him so very obliging a letter, and the pleasure the enclosed beautiful verses have given him, came very seasonably to his aid amid the cheerless gloom and sinking despondency of diseased nerves and December weather. As to forgetting the family of Glencairn, Heaven is my witness with what sincerity I could use those old verses which please me more in their rude simplicity than the most elegant lines I ever saw.

> If thee, Jerusalem, I forget,
> Skill part from my right hand
>
> My tongue to my mouth's roof let cleave,
> If I do thee forget,
> Jerusalem, and thee above
> My chief joy do not set —

When I am tempted to do any thing improper, I dare not, because I look on myself as accountable to your ladyship and family. Now and then when I have the honour to be called to the tables of the great, if I happen to meet with any mortification from the stately stupidity of self-sufficient squires,

or the luxurious insolence of upstart nabobs, I above the creatures by calling to remembrance that I am patronised by the Noble House of Glencairn; and at gala-times, such as New-Year's day, a christening, or the Kirn-night, when my punch-bowl is brought from its dusty corner and filled up in honour of the occasion, I begin with,—*The Countess of Glencairn!* My good woman, with the enthusiasm of a grateful heart, next cries, *My Lord!* and so the toast goes on until I end with *Lady Harriet's little angel!* whose epithalamium I have pledged myself to write.

When I received your ladyship's letter, I was just in the act of transcribing for you some verses I have lately composed; and meant to have sent them my first leisure hour, and acquainted you with my late change of life. I mentioned to my lord, my fears concerning my farm. Those fears were indeed too true; it is a bargain would have ruined me but for the lucky circumstance of my having an excise commission.

People may talk as they please, of the ignominy of the excise; 50*l.* a year will support my wife and children, and keep me independent of the world; and I would much rather have it said that my profession borrowed credit from me, than that I borrowed credit from my profession. Another advantage I have in this business, is the knowledge it gives me of the various shades of human character, consequently assisting me vastly in my poetic pur-

suits. I had the most ardent enthusiasm for the muses when nobody knew me, but myself, and that ardour is by no means cooled now that my lord Glencairn's goodness has introduced me to all the world. Not that I am in haste for the press I have no idea of publishing, else I certainly had consulted my noble generous patron, but after acting the part of an honest man, and supporting my family, my whole wishes and views are directed to poetic pursuits. I am aware that though I were to to give performances to the world superior to my former works, still if they were of the same kind with those, the comparative reception they would meet with would mortify me. I have turned my thoughts on the drama I do not mean the stately buskin of the tragic muse.

Does not your ladyship think that an Edinburgh theatre would be more amused with affectation, folly and whim of true Scotish growth, than manners which by far the greatest part of the audience can only know at second hand?

I have the honour to be,

Your ladyship's ever devoted

And grateful humble servant,

R. B.

No. CCXXI.

TO JOHN M^c^MURDO, Esq.

Dumfries, December, 1793.

Sir,

It is said that we take the greatest liberties with our greatest friends, and I pay myself a very high compliment in the manner in which I am going to apply the remark. I have owed you money longer than ever I owed it to any man.—Here is Ker's account, and here are six guineas; and now, I don't owe a shilling to man—or woman either. But for these damned dirty, dog's-ear'd little pages,* I had done myself the honour to have waited on you long ago. Independent of the obligations your hospitality has laid me under; the consciousness of your superiority in the rank of man and gentleman, of itself was fully as much as I could ever make head against; but to owe you money too, was more than I could face.

I think I once mentioned something of a collection of Scots songs I have for some years been making: I send you a perusal of what I have got

* Scottish Bank Notes.

together. I could not conveniently spare them above five or six days, and five or six glances of them will probably more than suffice you. A very few of them are my own. When you are tired of them, please leave them with Mr. Clint, of the King's Arms. There is not another copy of the collection in the world, and I should be sorry that any unfortunate negligence should deprive me of what has cost me a good deal of pains.

R. B.

[The collection of songs mentioned in this letter are not unknown to the curious in such loose lore. They were printed by an obscure bookseller when death had secured him against the indignation of Burns. Something of the feeling which influenced that mercenary miscreant seems not yet extinct. Indelicate poems which the author composed in moments of social gaiety are published by booksellers who call themselves respectable "Adam A.'s Prayer," and the whole of "Burns's Answer to the Reproof of a Tailor," beginning with these promising words,

"What ails ye now, ye lousy bitch,"

may be found mingled with the "Mountain Daisy" and "Man was made to Mourn." It was of such compositions that Burns thus entreated the world — "The author begs whoever into whose hands they may fall, that they will do him the justice not to publish what he himself thought proper to suppress." Ed.]

No. CCXXII.

TO JOHN M^cMURDO, Esq.

DRUMLANRIG.

Dumfries, 1793.

Will Mr. M^cMurdo do me the favour to accept of these volumes; a trifling but sincere mark of the very high respect I bear for his worth as a man, his manners as a gentleman, and his kindness as a friend. However inferior now, or afterwards, I may rank as a poet; one honest virtue to which few poets can pretend, I trust I shall ever claim as mine:—to no man, whatever his station in life, or his power to serve me, have I ever paid a compliment at the expence of TRUTH.

THE AUTHOR.

[These words are written on the blank leaf of the poet's works, published in two small volumes in 1793: the book is before me: the handwriting is bold and free—the pen seems to have been conscious that it was making a declaration of independence. ED.]

No. CCXXIII.

TO CAPTAIN ——.

Dumfries, 5th December, 1793

Sir,

Heated as I was with wine yesternight, I was perhaps rather seemingly impertinent in my anxious wish to be honoured with your acquaintance. You will forgive it: it was the impulse of heart-felt respect. "He is the father of the Scottish county reform, and is a man who does honour to the business at the same time that the business does honour to him," said my worthy friend Glenriddel to somebody by me who was talking of your coming to this country with your corps. "Then," I said, "I have a woman's longing to take him by the hand, and say to him, 'Sir, I honour you as a man to whom the interests of humanity are dear, and as a patriot to whom the rights of your country are sacred.'"

In times like these, Sir, when our commoners are barely able by the glimmer of their own twilight understandings to scrawl a frank, and when lords are what gentlemen would be ashamed to be, to whom shall a sinking country call for help? To

the independent country gentleman? To him who has too deep a stake in his country not to be in earnest for her welfare; and who in the honest pride of man can view with equal contempt the insolence of office and the allurements of corruption.

I mentioned to you a Scots ode or song I had lately composed, and which I think has some merit. Allow me to enclose it. When I fall in with you at the theatre, I shall be glad to have your opinion of it. Accept of it, Sir, as a very humble but most sincere tribute of respect from a man who, dear as he prizes poetic fame, yet holds dearer an independent mind. I have the honour to be,

R. B.

[I have copied this excellent letter from my friend Robert Chambers's interesting collection of Scottish songs. He obtained it from Mr. Stewart, of Dalguise, and employed it, as has already been done in this edition, to illustrate that glorious war ode,

"Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled."

ED.]

No. CCXXIV.

TO MRS. RIDDEL,

Who was about to bespeak a Play one evening at the Dumfries Theatre

I AM thinking to send my "Address" to some periodical publication, but it has not got your sanction, so pray look over it.

As to the Tuesday's play, let me beg of you, my dear Madam, to give us, "The Wonder, a Woman keeps a Secret!" to which please add, "The Spoilt Child"—you will highly oblige me by so doing.

Ah, what an enviable creature you are. There now, this cursed gloomy blue-devil day, you are going to a party of choice spirits—

> "To play the shapes
> Of frolic fancy, and incessant form
> Those rapid pictures, assembled train
> Of fleet ideas, never join'd before,
> Where lively *wit* excites to gay surprise;
> Or folly-painting *humour*, grave himself,
> Calls laughter forth, deep-shaking every nerve."

But as you rejoice with them that do rejoice, do also remember to weep with them that weep, and pity your melancholy friend. R. B.

[This lady, to whom the bard has so happily and justly applied the above quotation, paid the debt of nature a few months ago. The graces of her person were only equalled by the singular endowments of her mind, and her poetical talents rendered her an interesting friend to Burns, in a part of the world where he was in a great measure excluded from the sweet intercourse of literary society. GILBERT BURNS, 1820.]

No. CCXXV.

TO A LADY,

IN FAVOUR OF A PLAYER'S BENEFIT.

Dumfries, 1794.

MADAM,

YOU were so very good as to promise me to honour my friend with your presence on his benefit night. That night is fixed for Friday first the play a most interesting one! "The Way to Keep Him." I have the pleasure to know Mr. G. well. His merit as an actor is generally acknowledged. He has genius and worth which would do honour to patronage: he is a poor and modest man; claims which from their very *silence* have the more

forcible power on the generous heart. Alas, for pity! that from the indolence of those who have the good things of this life in their gift, too often does brazen-fronted importunity snatch that boon, the rightful due of retiring, humble want! Of all the qualities we assign to the author and director of Nature, by far the most enviable is—to be able "To wipe away all tears from all eyes." O what insignificant, sordid wretches are they, however chance may have loaded them with wealth, who go to their graves, to their magnificent *mausoleums*, with hardly the consciousness of having made one poor honest heart happy!

But I crave your pardon, Madam; I came to beg, not to preach.

R. B.

No. CCXXVI.

TO THE EARL OF BUCHAN,

With a Copy of Bruce's Address to his Troops at Bannockburn.

Dumfries, 12th January, 1794.

My Lord,

Will your lordship allow me to present you with the enclosed little composition of mine, as a small tribute of gratitude for the acquaintance with which you have been pleased to honour me. Independent of my enthusiasm as a Scotsman, I have rarely met with any thing in history, which interests my feelings as a man, equal with the story of Bannockburn. On the one hand, a cruel, but able usurper, leading on the finest army in Europe to extinguish the last spark of freedom among a greatly-daring and greatly-injured people; on the other hand, the desperate relics of a gallant nation, devoting themselves to rescue their bleeding country, or perish with her.

Liberty! thou art a prize truly, and indeed invaluable! for never canst thou be too dearly bought!

If my little ode has the honour of your lordship's approbation, it will gratify my highest ambition.

I have the honour to be, &c. R. B.

No. CCXXVII.

TO CAPTAIN MILLER,

DALSWINTON.

Dear Sir,

The following ode is on a subject which I know you by no means regard with indifference. Oh, Liberty,

> "Thou mak'st the gloomy face of nature gay,
> Giv'st beauty to the sun, and pleasure to the day."

It does me much good to meet with a man whose honest bosom glows with the generous enthusiasm, the heroic daring of liberty, that I could not forbear sending you a composition of my own on the subject, which I really think is in my best manner.

I have the honour to be,
Dear Sir, &c. R. B.

[Captain Miller, the "sodger youth" of one of Burns's election ballads, was member of Parliament in those days for the Dumfries district of boroughs: he has long ago retired from both the House of Commons and the army, and lives at the Forest on Nithside, almost opposite Friar's Carse. He inherits, it is said, not a

little of his father's sarcastic wit, and would have inherited the splendid estate of Dalswinton, but the vast outlay in the invention of steam-boats, improvements in the government packets, and experiments in artillery, reduced the family from great affluence. Ed.]

No. CCXXVIII.

TO Mrs. RIDDEL.

Dear Madam,

I meant to have called on you yesternight, but as I edged up to your box-door, the first object which greeted my view, was one of those lobster-coated puppies, sitting like another dragon, guarding the Hesperian fruit. On the conditions and capitulations you so obligingly offer, I shall certainly make my weather-beaten rustic phiz a part of your box-furniture on Tuesday; when we may arrange the business of the visit.

Among the profusion of idle compliments, which insidious craft, or unmeaning folly, incessantly offer at your shrine—a shrine, how far exalted above such adoration—permit me, were it but for rarity's sake, to pay you the honest tribute of a warm heart and an independent mind; and to assure you, that I am, thou most amiable, and most accomplished of thy sex, with the most respectful esteem, and fervent regard, thine, &c. R. B.

No. CCXXIX.

TO MRS. RIDDLL.

I WILL wait on you, my ever valued friend, but whether in the morning I am not sure. Sunday closes a period of our curst revenue business, and may probably keep me employed with my pen until noon. Fine employment for a poet's pen! There is a species of the human genus that I call *the gin-horse class:* what enviable dogs they are! Round, and round, and round they go,—Mundell's ox, that drives his cotton mill, is their exact prototype—without an idea or wish beyond their circle; fat, sleek, stupid, patient, quiet, and contented; while here I sit, altogether Novemberish, a d-mned melange of fretfulness and melancholy; not enough of the one to rouse me to passion, nor of the other to repose me in torpor; my soul flouncing and fluttering round her tenement, like a wild finch, caught amid the horrors of winter, and newly thrust into a cage. Well, I am persuaded that it was of me the Hebrew sage prophesied, when he foretold—"And behold, on whatsoever this man doth set his heart, it shall not prosper!" If my resentment is awaked, it is sure to be where it dare not squeak; and if— * * * * * *

Pray that wisdom and bliss be more frequent visitors of R. B.

No. CCXXX.

TO MRS. RIDDEL.

I HAVE this moment got the song from Syme, and I am sorry to see that he has spoilt it a good deal. It shall be a lesson to me how I lend him any thing again.

I have sent you "Werter," truly happy to have any the smallest opportunity of obliging you.

'Tis true, Madam, I saw you once since I was at Woodlea; and that once froze the very life-blood of my heart. Your reception of me was such, that a wretch meeting the eye of his judge, about to pronounce sentence of death on him, could only have envied my feelings and situation. But I hate the theme, and never more shall write or speak on it.

One thing I shall proudly say, that I can pay Mrs. R. a higher tribute of esteem, and appreciate her amiable worth more truly, than any man whom I have seen approach her. R. B.

No. CCXXXI.

TO, Mrs. RIDDEL.

I have often told you, my dear friend, that you had a spice of caprice in your composition, and you have as often disavowed it; even perhaps while your opinions were, at the moment, irrefragably proving it. Could *any thing* estrange me from a friend such as you?—No! To-morrow I shall have the honour of waiting on you.

Farewell, thou first of friends, and most accomplished of women; even with all thy little caprices!

R. B.

[Beauty is sometimes a little whimsical, and it is said that Mrs. Riddel gave the bard the full benefit of the "caprice" which he persists in saying was a part of her composition. She was no less sensible of his imperfections, but then she did not shut her eyes as many did on his high qualities, and chronicle nothing in her memory but that he was always

"Crazed wi' love or daized wi' drink."

Ed.]

No. CCXXXII.

TO Mrs. RIDDEL.

MADAM,

I RETURN your common-place book. I have perused it with much pleasure, and would have continued my criticisms, but as it seems the critic has forfeited your esteem, his strictures must lose their value.

If it is true that "offences come only from the heart," before you I am guiltless. To admire, esteem, and prize you, as the most accomplished of women, and the first of friends—if these are crimes, I am the most offending thing alive.

In a face where I used to meet the kind complacency of friendly confidence, *now* to find cold neglect, and contemptuous scorn—is a wrench that my heart can ill bear. It is, however, some kind of miserable good luck, that while *de haut-en-bas* rigour may depress an unoffending wretch to the ground, it has a tendency to rouse a stubborn something in his bosom, which, though it cannot

heal the wounds of his soul, is at least an opiate to blunt their poignancy.

With the profoundest respect for your abilities; the most sincere esteem, and ardent regard, for your gentle heart and amiable manners; and the most fervent wish and prayer for your welfare, peace, and bliss, I have the honour to be, Madam, your most devoted humble servant,

R. B.

[The offended lady, soothed by this submissive letter, readmitted the bard to her friendship. He found her, in the words of another minstrel,

"Forgiving all and good."

The language in which Burns commonly indulged, even in mixed companies, was racy and vigorous, scaring minds of small calibre, and giving occasion to the sensitive and the delicate to lament that he had not got his masculine intrepidity of speech tamed down by education and polished company. ED.]

No. CCXXXIII.

TO JOHN SYME, Esq.

You know that among other high dignities, you have the honour to be my supreme court of critical judicature, from which there is no appeal. I enclose you a song which I composed since I saw you, and I am going to give you the history of it. Do you know that among much that I admire in the characters and manners of those great folks whom I have now the honour to call my acquaintances, the Oswald family, there is nothing charms me more than Mr. Oswald's unconcealable attachment to that incomparable woman. Did you ever, my dear Syme, meet with a man who owed more to the Divine Giver of all good things than Mr. O.? A fine fortune; a pleasing exterior; self-evident amiable dispositions, and an ingenuous upright mind, and that informed too, much beyond the usual run of young fellows of his rank and fortune: and to all this, such a woman!—but of her I shall say nothing at all, in despair of saying any thing adequate: in my song, I have endeavoured to do justice to what would be his feelings, on seeing in the scene I have drawn, the habitation

of his Lucy. As I am a good deal pleased with my performance, I in my first fervour thought of sending it to Mrs. Oswald, but on second thoughts, perhaps what I offer as the honest incense of genuine respect, might, from the well-known character of poverty and poetry, be construed into some modification or other of that servility which my soul abhors. R. B.

[The song inclosed was that fine one beginning,

'O wat ye wha's in yon town,'

The oral communications of the poet with his friend John Syme were numerous: not so his communications with the pen: they were for some years near neighbours, and intercourse by letter was unnecessary. In one of Cunningham's letters he says to Burns, "I lately received a letter from our friend Barncallie—what a charming fellow lost to society—born to great expectations—with superior abilities, a pure heart and untainted morals; his fate in life has been hard indeed." It was the fate of Syme to lose the estate of Barncallie in Galloway, which passed from the family at his father's death. Of his talents something has already been said: he was one of the most agreeable men in company that ever did honour to a toast—he was celebrated too for his wit, his wine, and his dinners; some of his epigrams were imputed to Burns. His wife, a very handsome woman, was a most affectionate mother—her chief pleasure lay in seeing her children healthy and her husband happy. Ed.]

No. CCXXXIV.

TO MISS ——.

Dumfries, 1794.

MADAM,

NOTHING short of a kind of absolute necessity could have made me trouble you with this letter. Except my ardent and just esteem for your sense, taste, and worth, every sentiment arising in my breast, as I put pen to paper to you, is painful. The scenes I have passed with the friend of my soul and his amiable connexions! the wrench at my heart to think that he is gone, for ever gone from me, never more to meet in the wanderings of a weary world! and the cutting reflection of all, that I had most unfortunately, though most undeservedly, lost the confidence of that soul of worth, ere it took its flight!

These, Madam, are sensations of no ordinary anguish. — However, you also may be offended with some *imputed* improprieties of mine; sensibility you know I possess, and sincerity none will deny me.

To oppose those prejudices which have been raised against me, is not the business of this letter.

Indeed it is a warfare I know not how to wage. The powers of positive vice I can in some degree calculate, and against direct malevolence I can be on my guard; but who can estimate the fatuity of giddy caprice, or ward off the unthinking mischief of precipitate folly?

I have a favour to request of you, Madam; and of your sister Mrs. ——, through your means. You know that, at the wish of my late friend, I made a collection of all my trifles in verse which I had ever written. They are many of them local, some of them puerile and silly, and all of them unfit for the public eye. As I have some little fame at stake, a fame that I trust may live when the hate of those who "watch for my halting," and the contumelious sneer of those whom accident has made my superiors, will, with themselves, be gone to the regions of oblivion; I am uneasy now for the fate of those manuscripts—Will Mrs. —— have the goodness to destroy them, or return them to me? As a pledge of friendship they were bestowed; and that circumstance indeed was all their merit. Most unhappily for me, that merit they no longer possess; and I hope that Mrs. ——'s goodness, which I well know, and ever will revere, will not refuse this favour to a man whom she once held in some degree of estimation.

With the sincerest esteem, I have the honour to be, Madam, &c.

R. B.

[Burns, on several occasions, recalled both his letters and verses when on reflection he thought he had been too communicative and confiding. It is to be regretted that rhymes overwarm, and letters too open and outspoken, should have found their way to the world. Ed.]

No. CCXXXV.

TO Mr. CUNNINGHAM.

25th February, 1794.

Canst thou minister to a mind diseased? Canst thou speak peace and rest to a soul tost on a sea of troubles, without one friendly star to guide her course, and dreading that the next surge may overwhelm her? Canst thou give to a frame, tremblingly alive as the tortures of suspense, the stability and hardihood of the rock that braves the blast? If thou canst not do the least of these, why wouldst thou disturb me in my miseries, with thy inquiries after me?

* * * * * *

For these two months I have not been able to

to lift a pen. My constitution and frame were, *ab origine*, blasted with a deep incurable taint of hypochondria, which poisons my existence. Of late a number of domestic vexations, and some pecuniary share in the ruin of these cursed times; losses which, though trifling, were yet what I could ill bear, have so irritated me, that my feelings at times could only be envied by a reprobate spirit listening to the sentence that dooms it to perdition.

Are you deep in the language of consolation? I have exhausted in reflection every topic of comfort. *A heart at ease* would have been charmed with my sentiments and reasonings; but as to myself, I was like Judas Iscariot preaching the gospel; he might melt and mould the hearts of those around him, but his own kept its native incorrigibility.

Still there are two great pillars that bear us up, amid the wreck of misfortune and misery. The ONE is composed of the different modifications of a certain noble, stubborn something in man, known by the names of courage, fortitude, magnanimity. The OTHER is made up of those feelings and sentiments, which, however the sceptic may deny them, or the enthusiast disfigure them, are yet, I am convinced, original and component parts of the human soul; those *senses of the mind*, if I may be allowed the expression, which connect us with, and link us to, those awful obscure realities—an all-powerful, and equally beneficent God; and a world to come, beyond death and the grave. The first gives the

nerve of combat, while a ray of hope beams on the field: the last pours the balm of comfort into the wounds which time can never cure. . . . .

I do not remember, my dear Cunningham, that you and I ever talked on the subject of religion at all. I know some who laugh at it, as the trick of the crafty FEW, to lead the undiscerning MANY; or at most as an uncertain obscurity, which mankind can never know any thing of, and with which they are fools if they give themselves much to do. Nor would I quarrel with a man for his irreligion, any more than I would for his want of a musical ear. I would regret that he was shut out from what, to me and to others, were such superlative sources of enjoyment. It is in this point of view, and for this reason, that I will deeply imbue the mind of every child of mine with religion. If my son should happen to be a man of feeling, sentiment and taste, I shall thus add largely to his enjoyments. Let me flatter myself that this sweet little fellow, who is just now running about my desk, will be a man of a melting, ardent, glowing heart; and an imagination, delighted with the painter, and rapt with the poet. Let me figure him wandering out in a sweet evening, to inhale the balmy gales, and enjoy the growing luxuriance of the spring; himself the while in the blooming youth of life. He looks abroad on all nature, and through nature up to nature's God. His soul, by swift delighting degrees, is rapt above this sub-

lunary sphere until he can be silent no longer, and bursts out into the glorious enthusiasm of Thomson,

> "These, as they change, Almighty Father, these
> Are but the varied God.—The rolling year
> Is full of thee."

And so on in all the spirit and ardour of that charming hymn. These are no ideal pleasures, they are real delights; and I ask what of the delights among the sons of men are superior, not to say equal to them? And they have this precious, vast addition, that conscious virtue stamps them for their own; and lays hold on them to bring herself into the presence of a witnessing, judging, and approving God. R. B.

[The religious enthusiasm of Burns was reasonable and practical: he was no believer in the efficacy of faith without works, and regarded all claims to devotion which were not founded on the charities of life with suspicion. That he had his moments of doubt and fear is true; he had too much knowledge to be presumptuous. Ed.]

No. CCXXXVI.

TO THE EARL OF GLENCAIRN.

May, 1794.

MY LORD,

WHEN you cast your eye on the name at the bottom of this letter, and on the title-page of the book I do myself the honour to send your lordship, a more pleasurable feeling than my vanity tells me, that it must be a name not entirely unknown to you. The generous patronage of your late illustrious brother found me in the lowest obscurity: he introduced my rustic muse to the partiality of my country; and to him I owe all. My sense of his goodness, and the anguish of my soul at losing my truly noble protector and friend, I have endeavoured to express in a poem to his memory, which I have now published. This edition is just from the press; and in my gratitude to the dead, and my respect for the living (fame belies you, my lord, if you possess not the same dignity of man, which was your noble brother's characteristic feature), I had destined a copy for the Earl of Glencairn. I learnt just now that you are in town:—allow me to present it you.

I know, my lord, such is the vile, venal contagion

which pervades the world of letters, that professions of respect from an author, particularly from a poet, to a lord, are more than suspicious. I claim my by-past conduct, and my feelings at this moment, as exceptions to the too just conclusion. Exalted as are the honours of your lordship's name, and unnoted as is the obscurity of mine; with the uprightness of an honest man, I come before your lordship, with an offering, however humble, 'tis all I have to give, of my grateful respect; and to beg of you, my lord,—'tis all I have to ask of you, that you will do me the honour to accept of it.

I have the honour to be, R. B.

[The original letter is in the possession of the Honourable Mrs. Holland, of Poynings. From a memorandum on the back, it appears to have been written in May, 1794. Ed.]

No. CCXXXVII.

TO DR. ANDERSON.

Sir,

I am much indebted to my worthy friend Dr. Blacklock for introducing me to a gentleman of Dr. Anderson's celebrity; but when you do me the honour to ask my assistance in your proposed publication, Alas, Sir! you might as well think to cheapen a little honesty at the sign of an Advocate's wig, or humility under the Geneva band. I am a miserable hurried devil, worn to the marrow in the friction of holding the noses of the poor publicans to the grindstone of the Excise! and like Milton's Satan, for private reasons, am forced

"To do what yet tho' damn'd I would abhor."

—and except a couplet or two of honest execration

* * * * * * * R. B.

[Dr. Robert Anderson was one of the kindest and most benevolent authors of his time: his door was never shut against the deserving, and he held out his hand to almost all young literary aspirants. He was one of the first to discover the genius of Campbell, and the poet acknowledged his discernment in a dedication. He has been for some time numbered with the dead. Ed.]

No. CCXXXVIII.

TO DAVID MACCULLOCH, ESQ.

Dumfries, 21*st*. *June* 1794.

MY DEAR SIR,

MY long projected journey through your country is at last fixed: and on Wednesday next, if you have nothing of more importance to do, take a saunter down to Gatehouse about two or three o'clock, I shall be happy to take a draught of Mc Kune's best with you. Collector Syme will be at Glens about that time, and will meet us about dish-of-tea hour. Syme goes also to Kerroughtree, and let me remind you of your kind promise to accompany me there, I will need all the friends I can muster, for I am indeed ill at ease whenever I approach your honourables and right honourables.

yours, sincerely, R. B.

[The endorsement on the back of the original letter shows what is felt about Burns in far lands.

"Given to me by David M'Culloch, Penang, 1810.
A. FRASER."

"Received 15th December, 1823, in Calcutta, from Captain Fraser's widow by me, Thomas Rankine."

"Transmitted to Archibald Hastie, London; March 27th, 1824, from Bombay." ED.]

No. CCXXXIX,

TO Mrs. DUNLOP.

Castle Douglas, 25th June, 1794.

HERE in a solitary inn, in a solitary village, am I set by myself, to amuse my brooding fancy as I may. —Solitary confinement you know, is Howard's favourite idea of reclaiming sinners; so let me consider by what fatality it happens that I have so long been exceeding sinful as to neglect the correspondence of the most valued friend I have on earth. To tell you that I have been in poor health will not be excuse enough, though it is true. I am afraid that I am about to suffer for the follies of my youth. My medical friends threaten me with a flying gout; but I trust they are mistaken.

I am just going to trouble your critical patience with the first sketch of a stanza I have been framing as I passed along the road. The subject is Liberty: you know, my honoured friend, how dear the theme is to me. I design it an irregular ode for General Washington's birth-day. After having mentioned

the degeneracy of other kingdoms I come to Scotland thus:

"Thee, Caledonia, thy wild heaths among,
Thee, famed for martial deed and sacred song,
To thee I turn with swimming eyes;
Where is that soul of freedom fled?
Immingled with the mighty dead!
Beneath the hallowed turf where Wallace lies,
Hear it not, Wallace, in thy bed of death,
Ye babbling winds in silence sweep,
Disturb ye not the hero's sleep."

Vol. iii. *page* 243.

with the additions of

"That arm which nerved with thundering fate,
Braved usurpation's boldest daring!
One quenched in darkness like the sinking star,
And one the palsied arm of tottering, powerless age."

You will probably have another scrawl from me in a stage or two. R. B.

No. CCXL.

TO MR. JAMES JOHNSON.

Dumfries, 1794.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

You should have heard from me long ago; but over and above some vexatious share in the pecuniary losses of these accursed times, I have all this winter been plagued with low spirits and blue devils, so that *I have almost hung my harp on the willow trees.*

I am just now busy correcting a new edition of my poems, and this with my ordinary business, finds me in full employment.

I send you by my friend Mr. Wallace forty-one songs for your fifth volume; if we cannot finish it any other way, what would you think of Scots words to some beautiful Irish airs? In the mean time, at your leisure, give a copy of the Museum to my worthy friend, Mr. Peter Hill, Bookseller, to bind for me, interleaved with blank leaves, exactly as he did the Laird of Glenriddel's, that I may insert every anecdote I can learn, together with my own criticisms and remarks on the songs. A copy of this kind I shall leave with you, the editor, to publish at some after period, by way of making the Museum a

book famous to the end of time, and you renowned for ever.

I have got an Highland Dirk, for which I have great veneration; as it once was the dirk of *Lord Balmerino.* It fell into bad hands, who stripped it of the silver mounting, as well as the knife and fork. I have some thoughts of sending it to your care, to get it mounted anew.

Thank you for the copies of my Volunteer Ballad.—Our friend Clarke has done *indeed* well! 'tis chaste and beautiful. I have not met with anything that has pleased me so much. You know I am no Connoisseur: but that I am an Amateur—will be allowed me. R. B.

[" Burns's anxiety with regard to the correctness of his writings was very great. Being questioned as to his mode of composition, he replied, ' All my poetry is the effect of easy composition, but of *laborious correction.*' " CROMEK.]

No. CCXLI.

TO PETER MILLER, Jun. Esq.

OF DALSWINTON.

Dumfries, Nov. 1794.

Dear Sir,

Your offer is indeed truly generous, and most sincerely do I thank you for it; but in my present situation, I find that I dare not accept it. You well know my political sentiments; and were I an insular individual, unconnected with a wife and a family of children, with the most fervid enthusiasm I would have volunteered my services: I then could and would have despised all consequences that might have ensued.

My prospect in the Excise is something; at least, it is, encumbered as I am with the welfare, the very existence, of near half-a-score of helpless individuals, what I dare not sport with.

In the mean time, they are most welcome to my Ode; only, let them insert it as a thing they have met with by accident and unknown to me.—Nay, if Mr. Perry, whose honour, after your character of him I cannot doubt; if he will give me an address and channel by which any thing will come safe from those spies with which he may be certain that his

correspondence is beset, I will now and then send him any bagatelle that I may write. In the present hurry of Europe, nothing but news and politics will be regarded; but against the days of peace, which Heaven send soon, my little assistance may perhaps fill up an idle column of a newspaper. I have long had it in my head to try my hand in the way of little prose essays, which I propose sending into the world through the medium of some newspaper; and should these be worth his while, to these Mr. Perry shall be welcome; and all my reward shall be, his treating me with his paper, which, by the bye, to any body who has the least relish for wit, is a high treat indeed.

With the most grateful esteem, I am ever,

Dear Sir, R. B.,

[" In a conversation with his friend Mr. Perry, (the proprietor of " The Morning Chronicle,") Mr. Miller represented to that gentleman the insufficiency of Burns's salary to answer the imperious demands of a numerous family. In their sympathy for his misfortunes, and in their regret that his talents were nearly lost to the world of Letters, these gentlemen agreed on the plan of settling him in London. To accomplish this most desirable object, Mr. Perry, very spiritedly, made the Poet an handsome offer of an annual stipend for the exercise of his talents in his newspaper. Burns's reasons for refusing this offer are stated in the present letter." CROMEK.]

No. CCXLII.

TO MR. SAMUEL CLARKE, JUN.

DUMFRIES.

Sunday Morning.

DEAR SIR,

I WAS, I know, drunk last night, but I am sober this morning. From the expressions Capt. ——— made use of to me, had I had nobody's welfare to care for but my own, we should certainly have come, according to the manners of the world, to the necessity of murdering one another about the business. The words were such as, generally, I believe, end in a brace of pistols; but I am still pleased to think that I did not ruin the peace and welfare of a wife and a family of children in a drunken squabble. Farther you know that the report of certain political opinions being mine, has already once before brought me to the brink of destruction. I dread lest last night's business may be misrepresented in the same way.—You, I beg, will take care to prevent it. I tax your wish for Mr. Burns's welfare with the task of waiting as soon as possible, on every gentleman who was present, and state this to him, and, as you please,

shew him this letter. What, after all, was the obnoxious toast? "May our success in the present war be equal to the justice of our cause."—A toast that the most outrageous frenzy of loyalty cannot object to. I request and beg that this morning you will wait on the parties present at the foolish dispute. I shall only add, that I am truly sorry that a man who stood so high in my estimation as Mr. ——, should use me in the manner in which I conceive he has done. R. B.

[At this period of our poet's life, when political animosity was made the ground of private quarrel, the following foolish verses were sent as an attack on Burns and his friends for their political opinions. They were written by some member of a club styling themselves the Loyal Natives of Dumfries, or rather by the united genius of that club, which was more distinguished for drunken loyalty, than either for respectability or poetical talent. The verses were handed over the table to Burns at a convivial meeting, and he instantly indorsed the subjoined reply.

THE LOYAL NATIVES' VERSES.

"Ye sons of sedition, give ear to my song,
Let Syme, BURNS, and Maxwell, pervade every throng,
With Craken the attorney, and Mundell the quack,
Send Willie the monger to hell with a smack."

BURNS—*Extempore.*

"Ye true 'Loyal Natives,' attend to my song,
In uproar and riot rejoice the night long;
From *envy* and hatred your corps is exempt;
But where is your shield from the *darts of contempt?*"

CROMEK.]

No. CCXLIII.

TO Mrs. RIDDEL.

Supposes himself to be writing from the Dead to the Living.

Madam,

I dare say that this is the first epistle you ever received from this nether world. I write you from the regions of Hell, amid the horrors of the damned. The time and manner of my leaving your earth I do not exactly know, as I took my departure in the heat of a fever of intoxication, contracted at your too hospitable mansion; but, on my arrival here, I was fairly tried, and sentenced to endure the purgatorial tortures of this infernal confine for the space of ninety-nine years, eleven months, and twenty-nine days, and all on account of the impropriety of my conduct yesternight under your roof. Here am I, laid on a bed of pitiless furze, with my aching head reclined on a pillow of ever-piercing thorn, while an infernal tormentor, wrinkled, and old, and cruel, his name I think is *Recollection*, with a whip of scorpions, forbids peace or rest to approach me, and keeps anguish eternally awake. Still, Madam, if I could in any measure be reinstated in the good opinion of the fair circle whom my conduct last night so much injured, I think it would be an

alleviation to my torments. For this reason I trouble you with this letter. To the men of the company I will make no apology.—Your husband, who insisted on my drinking more than I chose, has no right to blame me; and the other gentlemen were partakers of my guilt. But to you, Madam, I have much to apologize. Your good opinion I valued as one of the greatest acquisitions I had made on earth, and I was truly a beast to forfeit it. There was a Miss I—— too, a woman of fine sense, gentle and unassuming manners—do make on my part, a miserable d-mned wretch's best apology to her. A Mrs. G——, a charming woman, did me the honour to be prejudiced in my favour; this makes me hope that I have not outraged her beyond all forgiveness.—To all the other ladies please present my humblest contrition for my conduct, and my petition for their gracious pardon. O all ye powers of decency and decorum! whisper to them that my errors, though great, were involuntary—that an intoxicated man is the vilest of beasts—that it was not in my nature to be brutal to any one—that to be rude to a woman, when in my senses, was impossible with me—but—

* * * * * *

Regret! Remorse! Shame! ye three hellhounds that ever dog my steps and bay at my heels, spare me! spare me!

Forgive the offences, and pity the perdition of, Madam, your humble slave. R. B.

No. CCXLIV.

TO MRS. RIDDEL.

MR. BURNS's compliments to Mrs. Riddel—is much obliged to her for her polite attention in sending him the book. Owing to Mr. B. being at present acting as supervisor of excise, a department that occupies his every hour of the day, he has not that time to spare which is necessary for any belle-lettre pursuit; but, as he will, in a week or two, again return to his wonted leisure, he will then pay that attention to Mrs. R.'s beautiful song, "To thee, loved Nith"—which it so well deserves. When "Anacharsis' Travels" come to hand, which Mrs. Riddel mentioned as her gift to the public library, Mr. B. will feel honoured by the indulgence of a perusal of them before presentation: it is a book he has never yet seen, and the regulations of the library allow too little leisure for deliberate reading.

Friday Evening.

P. S. Mr. Burns will be much obliged to Mrs. Riddel if she will favour him with a perusal of any of her poetical pieces which she may not have seen.

Dumfries—1795.

[I am indebted to my friend Sir Andrew Halliday for this characteristic note. He is now in the West Indies, and will not likely see this edition of his favourite poet till all the volumes have issued from the press. When he opens it he will observe how much use I have made of the many interesting conversations with which he indulged me—his taste is as true as his heart is warm —and in all matters connected with the history and literature of Scotland, I have never found him at a loss. In the song of "To thee loved Nith" alluded to by the poet, there are some fine verses.

"And now your banks and bonnie braes
  But waken sad remembrance' smart.
The very shades I held most dear
  Now strike fresh anguish to my heart:
Deserted bower! where are they now?
  Ah! where the garlands that I wove
With faithful care—each morn to deck
  The altars of ungrateful love.

The flowers of spring how gay they bloomed
  When last with him I wandered here,
The flowers of spring are past away
  For wintry horrors dark and drear.
Yon osier'd stream by whose lone banks
  My songs have lulled him oft to rest
Is now in icy fetters locked—
  Cold as my false love's frozen breast." Ed.]

No. CCXLV.

TO MISS FONTENELLE,

Dumfries, 1795.

MADAM,

IN such a bad world as our's, those who add to the scanty sum of our pleasures, are positively our benefactors. To you, Madam, on our humble Dumfries boards, I have been more indebted for entertainment than ever I was in prouder theatres. Your charms as a woman would ensure applause to the most indifferent actress, and your theatrical talents would ensure admiration to the plainest figure. This, Madam, is not the unmeaning or insidious compliment of the frivolous or interested; I pay it from the same honest impulse that the sublime of nature excites my admiration, or her beauties give me delight.

Will the foregoing lines* be of any service to you in your approaching benefit night? If they will I shall be prouder of my muse than ever. They are nearly extempore: I know they have no great merit; but though they should add but little to the entertainment of the evening, they give me the happiness of an opportunity to declare how much I have the honour to be, &c.

R. B.

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* Vide vol. iii. page 284.

No. CCXLVI.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

15*th December*, 1795.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

As I am in a complete Decemberish humour, gloomy, sullen, stupid, as even the Deity of Dulness herself could wish, I shall not drawl out a heavy letter with a number of heavier apologies for my late silence. Only one I shall mention, because I know you will sympathize in it: these four months, a sweet little girl, my youngest child, has been so ill, that every day, a week or less threatened to terminate her existence. There had much need be many pleasures annexed to the states of husband and father, for, God knows, they have many peculiar cares. I cannot describe to you the anxious, sleepless hours these ties frequently give me. I see a train of helpless little folks; me and my exertions all their stay: and on what a brittle thread does the life of man hang! If I am nipt off at the command of fate! even in all the vigour of manhood as I am—such things happen every day —Gracious God! what would become of my little

flock! 'Tis here that I envy your people of fortune.—A father on his death-bed, taking an everlasting leave of his children, has indeed woe enough; but the man of competent fortune leaves his sons and daughters independency and friends; while I—but I shall run distracted if I think any longer on the subject!

To leave talking of the matter so gravely, I shall sing with the old Scots ballad—

"O that I had ne'er been married,
I would never had nae care;
Now I've gotten wife and bairns,
They cry crowdie! evermair.

Crowdie! ance; crowdie! twice,
Crowdie! three times in a day;
An ye, crowdie! ony mair,
Ye'll crowdie! a' my meal away."—

—— *December, 24th.*

We have had a brilliant theatre here this season; only, as all other business does, it experiences a stagnation of trade from the epidemical complaint of the country, *want of cash*. I mentioned our theatre merely to lug in an occasional Address which I wrote for the benefit-night of one of the actresses, and which is as follows—

ADDRESS,

SPOKEN BY MISS FONTENELLE ON HER BENEFIT-NIGHT, DEC. 4, 1793, AT THE THEATRE, DUMFRIES.

"Still anxious to secure your partial favour."

(*Vide vol.* iii. *p.* 254.)

25th, Christmas Morning.

This, my much-loved friend, is a morning of wishes; accept mine—so heaven hear me as they are sincere! that blessings may attend your steps, and affliction know you not! In the charming words of my favourite author, "The Man of Feeling," 'May the Great Spirit bear up the weight of thy grey hairs and blunt the arrow that brings them rest!'

Now that I talk of authors, how do you like Cowper? Is not the "Task" a glorious poem? The religion of the "Task," bating a few scraps of Calvinistic divinity, is the religion of God and Nature; the religion that exalts, that ennobles man. Were not you to send me your "Zeluco," in return for mine? Tell me how you like my marks and notes through the book. I would not give a farthing for a book, unless I were at liberty to blot it with my criticisms.

I have lately collected, for a friend's perusal, all my letters; I mean those which I first sketched, in a rough draught, and afterwards wrote out fair. On looking over some old musty papers, which, from time to time, I had parcelled by, as trash that were scarce worth preserving, and which yet at the same time I did not care to destroy; I discovered many of these rude sketches, and have written, and am writing them out, in a bound MS. for my friend's library. As I wrote always to you the

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rhapsody of the moment, I cannot find a single scroll to you, except one, about the commencement of our acquaintance. If there were any possible conveyance, I would send you a perusal of my book.

R. B.

[Burns generally carried Cowper's "Task" in his pocket, and took it out when he found himself in a lonely road, or in a brewhouse where he had to wait sometimes to "gauge the browst." The copy which he used was one lent to him by Mrs. Dunlop, he enriched the margins with notes, critical and commendatory, and from the number of the marks and the frequency of the praise it appears that the English bard was a great favourite. This precious volume was after the death of the poet placed in the library at Dunlop: but the family carrying it with them one winter to Edinburgh, it was unfortunately destroyed by fire, along with other volumes which had been in the hands of Burns, and attested equally his feelings and taste.

Ed.]

No. CCXLVII.

TO Mr. ALEXANDER FINDLATER,

SUPERVISOR OF EXCISE, DUMFRIES.

Sir,

Enclosed are the two schemes. I would not have troubled you with the collector's one, but for suspicion lest it be not right. Mr. Erskine promised me to make it right, if you will have the goodness to show him how. As I have no copy of the scheme for myself, and the alterations being very considerable from what it was formerly, I hope that I shall have access to this scheme I send you, when I come to face up my new books. *So much for schemes.*—And that no scheme to betray a FRIEND, or mislead a STRANGER; to seduce a YOUNG GIRL, or rob a HEN-ROOST; to subvert LIBERTY, or bribe an EXCISEMAN; to disturb the GENERAL ASSEMBLY, or annoy a GOSSIPPING; to overthrow the credit of ORTHODOXY, or the authority of OLD SONGS; to oppose *your wishes,* or frustrate *my hopes*—MAY PROSPER—is the sincere wish and prayer of

R. B.

No. CCXLVIII.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING CHRONICLE.

Dumfries, 1795.

SIR,

You will see by your subscribers' list, that I have been about nine months of that number.

I am sorry to inform you, that in that time, seven or eight of your papers either have never been sent me, or else have never reached me. To be deprived of any one number of the first newspaper in Great Britain for information, ability and independence, is what I can ill brook and bear; but to be deprived of that most admirable oration of the Marquis of Lansdowne, when he made the great, though ineffectual attempt, (in the language of the poet, I fear too true,)* to save a SINKING STATE"— this was a loss that I neither can, nor will forgive you.—That paper, Sir, never reached me; but I demand it of you. I am a BRITON; and must be interested in the cause of LIBERTY:—I am a MAN; and the RIGHTS of HUMAN NATURE cannot be indifferent to me. However, do not let me mislead you:

I am not a man in that situation of life, which, as your subscriber, can be of any consequence to you, in the eyes of those to whom SITUATION OF LIFE ALONE is the criterion of MAN.—I am but a plain tradesman, in this distant, obscure country town: but that humble domicile in which I shelter my wife and children, is the CASTELLUM of a BRITON; and that scanty, hard-earned income which supports them, is as truly my property, as the most magnificent fortune, of the most PUISSANT MEMBER of your HOUSE of NOBLES.

These, Sir, are my sentiments; and to them I subscribe my name: and were I a man of ability and consequence enough to address the PUBLIC, with that name should they appear.

I am, &c.

["This letter" says Cormek "owes its origin to the following circumstance. A neighbour of the Poet's at Dumfries, called on him and complained that he had been greatly disappointed in the irregular delivery of the Paper of *The Morning Chronicle*. Burns asked, 'Why do not you write to the Editors of the Paper?' Good God, Sir, can *I* presume to write to the learned Editors of a Newspaper?—Well, if *you* are afraid of writing to the Editors of a Newspaper, *I* am not; and if you think proper, I'll draw up a sketch of a letter which you may copy.

'Burn's tore a leaf from his excise book, and instantly

produced the sketch which I have transcribed, and which is here printed. The poor man thanked him, and took the letter home. However, that caution which the watchfulness of his enemies had taught him to exercise, prompted him to the prudence of begging a friend to wait on the person for whom it was written, and request the favour to have it returned. This request was complied with, and the paper never appeared in print."

James Perry, editor and proprietor of the Morning Chronicle, was one of the most intelligent and enterprising of British Journalists. He considered himself to be a sound old Whig, and by his satiric sallies and sharp scrutiny of public men and motives was as a thistle and a thorn to the Tories for a full quarter of a century. He was one of the first in giving interest and importance to

"The folio of four pages,"

which it has maintained and more than maintained since. Perry was a native of Aberdeen: he was social and friendly and held fast by his integrity, during very trying and changeful times. Ed.]

No. CCXLIX.

TO COLONEL W. DUNBAR.

I am not gone to Elysium, most noble Colonel, but am still here in this sublunary world, serving my God by propagating his image, and honouring my king by begetting him loyal subjects. Many happy returns of the season await my friend! May the thorns of care never beset his path! May peace be an inmate of his bosom, and rapture a frequent visitor of his soul! May the blood-hounds of misfortune never trace his steps, nor the screech-owl of sorrow alarm his dwelling! May enjoyment tell thy hours, and pleasure number thy days, thou friend of the Bard! Blessed be he that blesseth thee, and cursed be he that curseth thee!

[William Dunbar was one of the Edinburgh friends of the Poet; and Colonel of the Crochallan Fencibles—a Club of choice Spirits, whose motto was wit and wine.
Ed.]

No. CCL.

TO MR. HERON,

OF HERON.

Dumfries, 1794, or 1795.

SIR,

I ENCLOSE you some copies of a couple of political ballads; one of which, I believe, you have never seen. Would to Heaven I could make you master of as many votes in the Stewartry—but—

> "Who does the utmost that he can,
> Does well, acts nobly, angels could no more."

In order to bring my humble efforts to bear with more effect on the foe, I have privately printed a good many copies of both ballads, and have sent them among friends all about the country.

To pillory on Parnassus the rank reprobation of character, the utter dereliction of all principle, in a profligate junto which has not only outraged virtue, but violated common decency; which, spurning even hypocrisy as paltry iniquity below their daring;—to unmask their flagitiousness to the broadest day—to deliver such over to their merited fate, is surely not merely innocent, but laudable; is not only propriety, but virtue. You have already, as

your auxiliary, the sober detestation of mankind on the heads of your opponents; and I swear by the lyre of Thalia to muster on your side all the votaries of honest laughter, and fair, candid ridicule!

I am extremely obliged to you for your kind mention of my interests in a letter which Mr. Syme shewed me. At present my situation in life must be in a great measure stationary, at least for two or three years. The statement is this—I am on the supervisors' list, and as we come on there by precedency, in two or three years I shall be at the head of that list, and be appointed *of course*. *Then*, a FRIEND might be of service to me in getting me into a place of the kingdom which I would like. A supervisor's income varies from about a hundred and twenty to two hundred a year; but the business is an incessant drudgery, and would be nearly a complete bar to every species of literary pursuit. The moment I am appointed supervisor, in the common routine, I may be nominated on the collector's list; and this is always a business purely of political patronage. A collectorship varies much, from better than two hundred a year to near a thousand. They also come forward by precedency on the list; and have, besides a handsome income, a life of complete leisure. A life of literary leisure with a decent competency, is the summit of my wishes. It would be the prudish affectation of silly pride in me to say that I do not need, or would not be indebted to a political friend; at the same time, Sir, I by no means

lay my affairs before you thus, to hook my dependant situation on your benevolence. If, in my progress of life, an opening should occur where the good offices of a gentleman of your public character and political consequence might bring me forward, I shall petition your goodness with the same frankness as I now do myself the honour to subscribe myself,

R. B.

[Part of this letter was printed by Currie; the whole was published in the Reliques by Cromek. In the note on the Election Ballads a mistake was made, which the editor sought to repair in his observations on the song to the air of the Banks of Cree: he had no wish to give pain, and certainly no desire to say what was untrue. Patrick Heron, to whom this letter is addressed, died, as all his friends would desire to die—in bed, at peace with himself and with mankind. Ed.]

No. CCLI.

TO Mrs. DUNLOP.

IN LONDON.

Dumfries, 20th December, 1795.

I have been prodigiously disappointed in this London journey of yours. In the first place, when your last to me reached Dumfries, I was in the country, and did not return until too late to answer your letter; in the next place, I thought you would certainly take this route; and now I know not what is become of you, or whether this may reach you at all.—God grant that it may find you and yours in prospering health and good spirits! Do let me hear from you the soonest possible.

As I hope to get a frank from my friend Captain Miller, I shall every leisure hour, take up the pen, and gossip away whatever comes first, prose or poetry, sermon or song. In this last article I have abounded of late. I have often mentioned to you a superb publication of Scottish Songs, which is making its appearance in your great metropolis, and where I have the honour to preside over the Scot-

tish verse, as no less a personage than Peter Pindar does over the English.

December 29th.

Since I began this letter, I have been appointed to act in the capacity of supervisor here, and I assure you, what with the load of business, and what with that business being new to me, I could scarcely have commanded ten minutes to have spoken to you, had you been in town, much less to have written you an epistle. This appointment is only temporary, and during the illness of the present incumbent; but I look forward to an early period when I shall be appointed in full form: a consummation devoutly to be wished! My political sins seem to be forgiven me.

This is the season (New-year's-day is now my date) of wishing; and mine are most fervently offered up for you! May life to you be a positive blessing while it lasts, for your own sake; and that it may yet be greatly prolonged, is my wish for my own sake, and for the sake of the rest of your friends! What a transient business is life! Very lately I was a boy; but t'other day I was a young man; and I already begin to feel the rigid fibre and stiffening joints of old age coming fast o'er my frame. With all my follies of youth, and I fear, a few vices of manhood, still I congratulate myself on having had in early days religion strongly impressed on my

mind. I have nothing to say to any one as to which sect he belongs to, or what creed he believes: but I look on the man, who is firmly persuaded of infinite wisdom and goodness, superintending and directing every circumstance that can happen in his lot—I felicitate such a man as having a solid foundation for his mental enjoyment; a firm prop and sure stay, in the hour of difficulty, trouble, and distress; and a never-failing anchor of hope, when he looks beyond the grave.

January 12th.

You will have seen our worthy and ingenious friend, the Doctor, long ere this. I hope he is well, and beg to be remembered to him. I have just been reading over again, I dare say for the hundred and fiftieth time, his *View of Society and Manners*; and still I read it with delight. His humour is perfectly original—it is neither the humour of Addison, nor Swift, nor Sterne, nor of any body but Dr. Moore. By the bye, you have deprived me of *Zeluco*, remember that, when you are disposed to rake up the sins of my neglect from among the ashes of my laziness.

He has paid me a pretty compliment, by quoting me in his last publication.* R. B.

* * * * * *

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* Edward.

No. CCLII.

Address of the Scotch Distillers

THE RIGHT HON. WILLIAM PITT.

Sir,

While pursy burgesses crowd your gate, sweating under the weight of heavy addresses, permit us, the quondam distillers in that part of Great Britain called Scotland, to approach you, not with venal approbation, but with fraternal condolence; not as what you are just now, or for some time have been; but as what, in all probability, you will shortly be.—We shall have the merit of not deserting our friends in the day of their calamity, and you will have the satisfaction of perusing at least one honest address. You are well acquainted with the dissection of human nature, nor do you need the assistance of a fellow-creature's bosom to inform you, that man is always a selfish, often a perfidious being.—This assertion, however the hasty conclusions of superficial observation may doubt of it, or the raw inexperience of youth may deny it, those who make the fatal experiment we have done, will feel.—You are a states-

man, and consequently are not ignorant of the traffic of these corporation compliments.—The little great man who drives the borough to market, and the very great man who buys the borough in that market, they two do the whole business; and you well know, they, likewise, have their price. With that sullen disdain which you can so well assume, rise, illustrious Sir, and spurn these hireling efforts of venal stupidity. At best they are the compliments of a man's friends on the morning of his execution: they take a decent farewell; resign you to your fate; and hurry away from your approaching hour.

If fame say true, and omens be not very much mistaken, you are about to make your exit from that world where the sun of gladness gilds the paths of prosperous men: permit us, great Sir, with the sympathy of fellow-feeling to hail your passage to the realms of ruin.

Whether the sentiment proceed from the selfishness or cowardice of mankind is immaterial; but, to point out to a child of misfortune those who are still more unhappy, is to give him some degree of positive enjoyment. In this light, Sir, our downfal may be again useful to you:—Though not exactly in the same way, it is not perhaps the first time it has gratified your feelings. It is true, the triumph of your evil star is exceedingly despiteful.—At an age when others are the votaries of pleasure, or underlings in business, you had attained the highest wish of a British Statesman; and with the ordinary

date of human life, what a prospect was before you! Deeply rooted in *Royal Favour*, you overshadowed the land. The birds of passage, which follow ministerial sunshine through every clime of political faith and manners, flocked to your branches; and the beasts of the field (the lordly possessors of hills and valleys), crowded under your shade. "But behold a watcher, a holy one came down from heaven, and cried aloud, and said thus: Hew down the tree, and cut of his branches; shake of his leaves, and scatter his fruit; let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches!" A blow from an unthought-of quarter, one of those terrible accidents which peculiarly mark the hand of Omnipotence, overset your career, and laid all your fancied honours in the dust. But turn your eyes, Sir, to the tragic scenes of our fate.—An ancient nation that for many ages had gallantly maintained the unequal struggle for independence with her much more powerful neighbour, at last agrees to a union which should ever after make them one people. In consideration of certain circumstances, it was covenanted that the former should enjoy a stipulated alleviation in her share of the public burdens, particularly in that branch of the revenue called the Excise. This just privilege has of late given great umbrage to some interested, powerful individuals of the more potent part of the empire, and they have spared no wicked pains, under insidious pretexts, to subvert what they dared not

openly to attack, from the dread which they yet entertained of the spirit of their ancient enemies.

In this conspiracy we fell; nor did we alone suffer, our country was deeply wounded. A number of (we will say) respectable individuals, largely engaged in trade, where we were not only useful but absolutely necessary to our country in her dearest interests; we, with all that was near and dear to us, were sacrificed without remorse, to the infernal deity of political expediency! We fell to gratify the wishes of dark envy, and the views of unprincipled ambition! Your foes, Sir, were avowed; were too brave to take an ungenerous advantage; *you* fell in the face of day.—On the contrary, our enemies, to complete our overthrow, contrived to make their guilt appear the villany of a nation.—Your downfal only drags with you your private friends and partisans: in our misery are more or less involved the most numerous and most valuable part of the community—all those who immediately depend on the cultivation of the soil, from the landlord of a province, down to his lowest hind.

Allow us, Sir, yet farther, just to hint at another rich vein of comfort in the dreary regions of adversity;—the gratulations of an approving conscience. In a certain great assembly, of which you are a distinguished member, panegyrics on your private virtues have so often wounded your delicacy, that we shall not distress you with any thing on the subject. There is, however, one part of your public

conduct which our feelings will not permit us to pass in silence; our gratitude must trespass on your modesty; we mean, worthy Sir, your whole behaviour to the Scots Distillers.—In evil hours, when obtrusive recollection presses bitterly on the sense, let that, Sir, come like an healing angel, and speak the peace to your soul which the world can neither give nor take away.

We have the honour to be,
Sir,
Your sympathizing fellow-sufferers,
And grateful humble Servants,
JOHN BARLEYCORN—Præses.

[This ironical Address was found among the Papers of the Poet. In evil hours when obtrusive recollections pressed bitterly on the sense, perhaps the remembrance of having aided in crushing the great and glorious spirit of Burns came with no healing on its wings across the mind of Pitt. The success of Napoleon avenged the sufferings of the bard: nor has the memory of the late Lord Melville escaped without reproach. When the copyright of Burns's works was debated in the House of Lords in 1812, Earl Grey dwelt upon the sinfulness of having neglected such a genius, and assigned to Lord Melville a greater share in starving him than some of of his lordship's friends seemed to relish. ED.]

No. CCLIII.

HON. THE PROVOST, BAILIES, AND TOWN COUNCIL OF DUMFRIES.

Gentlemen,

The literary taste and liberal spirit of your good town has so ably filled the various departments of your schools, as to make it a very great object for a parent to have his children educated in them. Still, to me, a stranger, with my large family, and very stinted income, to give my young ones that education I wish, at the high-school fees which a stranger pays, will bear hard upon me.

Some years ago your good town did me the honour of making me an honorary Burgess.—Will you allow me to request that this mark of distinction may extend so far, as to put me on a footing of a real freeman of the town, in the schools?

If you are so very kind as to grant my request, it will certainly be a constant incentive to me to strain every nerve where I can officially serve you;

and will, if possible, increase that grateful respect with which I have the honour to be,

Gentlemen,

Your devoted humble Servant,

R. B.

[The Provost and Bailies complied at once with the humble request of the Poet: he was induced to make it through the persuasions of James Gray and Thomas White, Masters of the Grammar School of Dumfries. These were not ordinary men: the "Sabbath among the Mountains," and the "Cona" of the former, show much poetic feeling, while the mathematical discoveries of the latter give him a station among the followers of science. Gray, an accomplished scholar, ardent and enthusiastic, died in the East Indies: White, equally ardent and impetuous remained at home. Their memories are still held in grateful remembrance on the Banks of Nith. ED.]

No. CCLIV.

TO Mrs. RIDDEL.

Dumfries, 20th January, 1796.

I cannot express my gratitude to you for allowing me a longer perusal of "Anacharsis." In fact, I never met with a book that bewitched me so much; and I, as a member of the library, must warmly feel the obligation you have laid us under. Indeed to me, the obligation is stronger than to any other individual of our society; as "Anacharsis" is an indispensable desideratum to a son of the muses.

The health you wished me in your morning's card, is, I think, flown from me for ever. I have not been able to leave my bed to-day till about an hour ago. These wickedly unlucky advertisements I lent (I did wrong) to a friend, and I am ill able to go in quest of him.

The muses have not quite forsaken me. The following detached stanzas I intend to interweave in some disastrous tale of a shepherd.

R. B.

No. CCLV.

TO MRS. DUNLOP.

Dumfries, 31st January, 1796.

THESE many months you have been two packets in my debt—what sin of ignorance I have committed against so highly valued a friend I am utterly at a loss to guess. Alas! Madam, ill can I afford, at this time, to be deprived of any of the small remnant of my pleasures. I have lately drunk deep of the cup of affliction. The autumn robbed me of my only daughter and darling child, and that at a distance too, and so rapidly, as to put it out of my power to pay the last duties to her. I had scarcely begun to recover from that shock, when I became myself the victim of a most severe rheumatic fever, and long the die spun doubtful; until after many weeks of a sick bed, it seems to have turned up life, and I am beginning to crawl across my room, and once indeed have been before my own door in the street.

"When pleasure fascinates the mental sight,
Affliction purifies the visual ray,
Religion hails the drear, the untried night,
And shuts, for ever shuts! life's doubtful da

R. B.

[It seems all but certain that Mrs. Dunlop regarded the poet with some little displeasure during the evening of his days. His political sins and convivial delinquencies were likely the cause of this: it is however doubtful whether or not she knew of his sinking condition. That the bright career of Burns was so soon to conclude in the darkness of death, seems never to have crossed the mind of friend or foe till he returned from the Brow a dying man. ED.]

No. CCLVI.

TO MRS. RIDDEL,

Who had desired him to go to the Birth-Day Assembly on that day to shew his loyalty.

Dumfries, 4th June, 1796.

I AM in such miserable health as to be utterly incapable of shewing my loyalty in any way. Rackt as I am with rheumatisms, I meet every face with a greeting, like that of Balak to Balaam—"Come curse me Jacob; and come defy me Israel!" So say I—Come curse me that east wind; and come, defy me the north! Would you have me in such circumstances copy you out a love-song?

I may perhaps see you on Saturday, but I will not be at the ball.—Why should I? "man delights not me, nor woman either!" Can you supply me with the song, "Let us all be unhappy together"—do if you can, and oblige *le pauvre miserable*.

R. B.

[This is the last letter which Burns addressed to the beautiful and accomplished Mrs. Riddel. In addition to the composition of a very admirable memoir of the poet, that lady bestirred herself much in rousing his friends both in Scotland and England to raise a monument at Dumfries to his memory. She subscribed largely herself: she induced others to do the same, and she corresponded with both Banks and Flaxman on the subject of designs. Her letters are now before me: one of them will suffice to show the reader that Mrs. Riddel had forgiven the bard for all his lampoons, and was earnest in doing his memory honour:

"Sir,

"In answer to yours of the 10th last month, I will trouble you with a few lines on the subject of the bard's monument, having corresponded with several persons upon the subject (Dr. Currie, &c.) whose judgment is very far preferable to mine, and we all agree that the first thing to be done is to collect what money *can* be got for that purpose, in which we will *all* do what service we can as soon as the posthumous works are published; but those who are at all *saddled* with that business must get *it* off their hands before they commence

another undertaking. Perhaps an application, or at any rate the *consulting* with Mr. Flaxman on the subject of the design, &c. might answer better from and with persons he is already acquainted with, and more heads than *one* should be called in counsel on the occasion. If, therefore, you or the other gentlemen concerned in this project think it proper, I will talk it over with Mr. Flaxman and some other artists, friends of his, whom I know, and Mr. F. can *then* let *you* know his ideas on the subject. The monument should be characteristic of him to whom it is raised, and the artist must somehow be made acquainted with him and *his works*, which it is possible he may not be at present. The inscription should be *first rate*. I think either Roscoe or Dr. Darwin would contribute their talents for the purpose, and it could not be given into better hands. I have no names to add to your list; but whenever *that* for the posthumous works is *closed*, I will set to work in earnest. Pray remember me to Mr. Syme when you see him, *from whom*, I know not *why*, I *never hear now*.

"I am, Sir,

"Your humble servant,

"MARIA RIDDEL."

"*Richmond, 20th May*, 1799."

Of the merits of the designs it is difficult to judge without the drawings: Mrs. Riddel admired two, of which she gives the following description. "The first, which I think the handsomest, is a shrine enclosing a very beautiful female figure bending over a sort of sarcophagus, which is partly covered by drapery. This is really very elegant and classical, but it is expensive. The second design is a female figure, likewise very

elegant, on a pedestal: with the addition of an attribute, either of these might be taken for Coila, whom Burns delighted to personify as his guardian genius." These designs were by Flaxman: they seem not to have pleased the friends of the poet in the vale of Nith: the intention of a monument was abandoned till a later day, when it was successfully revived by William Grierson in Dumfries, and the late Alexander Key, Esq. in London. It would have been as well had the sculpture equalled the elegance of the architectural shrine which encloses it: that this is the opinion of others well qualified to judge, the following passage of a letter to the Editor from one of our greatest living poets will abundantly show:

"Last summer I visited Staffa, Iona, and part of the Western Highlands, and returned through your town of Dumfries, having for the first time passed through Burns's country. It gave me much pleasure to see Kilmarnock, Mauchline, Mossgiel Farm, the Ayr, which we crossed where he winds his way most romantically through rocks and woods: and to have a sight of Irwin and Lugar, which naebody sung till he named them in immortal verse. The banks of the Nith I had seen before, and was glad to renew my acquaintance with them. By the bye, what a sorry piece of sculpture is Burns's monument in Dumfries churchyard—monstrous in conception and clumsy in execution. It is a disgrace to the memory of the poet." Ed.]

No. CCLVII.

TO Mr. JAMES JOHNSON,

EDINBURGH.

Dumfries, 4th July, 1796.

How are you, my dear friend, and how comes on your fifth volume? You may probably think that for some time past I have neglected you and your work; but, alas! the hand of pain, and sorrow, and care, has these many months lain heavy on me! Personal and domestic affliction have almost entirely banished that alacrity and life with which I used to woo the rural muse of Scotia.

You are a good, worthy, honest fellow, and have a good right to live in this world—because you deserve it. Many a merry meeting this publication has given us, and possibly it may give us more, though, alas! I fear it. This protracting, slow, consuming illness which hangs over me, will, I doubt much, my ever dear friend, arrest my sun

before he has well reached his middle career, and will turn over the poet to far more important concerns than studying the brilliancy of wit, or the pathos of sentiment! However, *hope* is the cordial of the human heart, and I endeavour to cherish it as well as I can.

Let me hear from you as soon as convenient. —Your work is a great one; and now that it is finished, I see, if we were to begin again, two or three things that might be mended; yet I will venture to prophesy, that to future ages your publication will be the text-book and standard of Scottish song and music.

I am ashamed to ask another favour of you, because you have been so very good already; but my wife has a very particular friend of hers, a young lady who sings well, to whom she wishes to present the "Scots Musical Museum." If you have a spare copy, will you be so obliging as to send it by the very first *fly*, as I am anxious to have it soon.

Yours ever, R. B.

["In this humble and delicate manner did poor Burns ask for a copy of a work of which he was principally the founder, and to which he had contributed, *gratuitously*, not less than 184 *original, altered, and collected songs!* The editor has seen 180 transcribed by his own hand for the 'Museum.'" CROMEK.]

CCLVIII.

TO Mr. CUNNINGHAM.

Brow, Sea-bathing quarters, 7th July, 1796.

My Dear Cunningham,

I received yours here this moment, and am indeed highly flattered with the approbation of the literary circle you mention; a literary circle inferior to none in the two kingdoms. Alas! my friend, I fear the voice of the bard will soon be heard among you no more! For these eight or ten months I have been ailing, sometimes bedfast and sometimes not; but these last three months I have been tortured with an excruciating rheumatism, which has reduced me to nearly the last stage. You actually would not know me if you saw me.—Pale, emaciated, and so feeble, as occasionally to need help from my chair—my spirits fled! fled!—but I can no more on the subject—only the medical folks tell me that my last and only chance is bathing and country quarters, and riding.—The deuce of the matter is this; when an exciseman is off duty, his salary is reduced to 35*l*. instead of 50*l*.—What way, in the name of thrift,

shall I maintain myself, and keep a horse in country quarters—with a wife and five children at home, on 35*l.*? I mention this, because I had intended to beg your utmost interest, and that of all the friends you can muster, to move our commissioners of excise to grant me the full salary; I dare say you know them all personally. If they do not grant it me, I must lay my account with an exit truly *en poëte*, if I die not of disease, I must perish with hunger.

I have sent you one of the songs; the other my memory does not serve me with, and I have no copy here; but I shall be at home soon, when I will send it you.—Apropos to being at home, Mrs. Burns threatens in a week or two, to add one more to my paternal charge, which, if of the right gender, I intend shall be introduced to the world by the respectable designation of *Alexander Cunningham Burns*. My last was *James Glencairn*, so you can have no objection to the company of nobility. Farewell. R. B.

[The poet's humble request of the continuance of his full salary was not granted. "The Commissioners," says Currie, "were guilty of no such weakness." To be merciful was "clean against rules." Ed.]

No. CCLIX.

TO Mr. GILBERT BURNS.

10th July, 1796.

Dear Brother,

It will be no very pleasing news to you to be told that I am dangerously ill, and not likely to get better. An inveterate rheumatism has reduced me to such a state of debility, and my appetite is so totally gone, that I can scarcely stand on my legs. I have been a week at sea-bathing, and I will continue there, or in a friend's house in the country, all the summer. God keep my wife and children: if I am taken from their head, they will be poor indeed. I have contracted one or two serious debts, partly from my illness these many months, partly from too much thoughtlessness as to expense when I came to town, that will cut in too much on the little I leave them in your hands. Remember me to my mother.

Yours, R. B.

No. CCLX.

TO MRS. BURNS.

Brow, Thursday.

MY DEAREST LOVE,

I DELAYED writing until I could tell you what effect sea-bathing was likely to produce. It would be injustice to deny that it has eased my pains, and I think has strengthened me; but my appetite is still extremely bad. No flesh nor fish can I swallow: porridge and milk are the only thing I can taste. I am very happy to hear, by Miss Jess Lewars, that you are all well. My very best and kindest compliments to her, and to all the children. I will see you on Sunday.

Your affectionate husband, R. B.

[One evening during Burns's stay at the Brow, he was visited by two young ladies who lived in the neighbourhood and sympathized in his sufferings. During their stay the sun, setting on the western hills, threw a strong light upon him through the window: a child perceived this, and proceeded to draw the curtain. "Let me look at the sun, my love," said the sinking poet, "it will be long before he will shine for me again." ED.]

No. CCLXI.

TO Mrs. DUNLOP.

Brow, Saturday, 12th July, 1796.

Madam,

I have written you so often, without receiving any answer, that I would not trouble you again, but for the circumstances in which I am. An illness which has long hung about me, in all probability will speedily send me beyond that *bourn whence no traveller returns.* Your friendship, with which for many years you honoured me, was a friendship dearest to my soul. Your conversation, and especially your correspondence, were at once highly entertaining and instructive. With what pleasure did I use to break up the seal! The remembrance yet adds one pulse more to my poor palpitating heart. Farewell!!! R. B.

[" Burns had, however, the pleasure," says Currie, " of receiving a satisfactory explanation of his friend's silence, and an assurance of the continuance of her friendship to his widow and children; an assurance that has been amply fulfilled. It is probable that the greater part of her letters to him were destroyed by

our bard about the time that this last was written. He did not foresee that his own letters to her were to appear in print, nor conceive the disappointment that will be felt, that a few of this excellent lady's have not served to enrich and adorn the collection. The above letter is supposed to be the last production of Robert Burns, who died on the 21st of the month, nine days afterwards." The kindness of three friends enable me to add others of a date still later. Ed.]

No. CCLXII.

TO Mr. JAMES BURNESS,

WRITER, MONTROSE.

Dumfries, 12th July.

My dear Cousin,

When you offered me money assistance, little did I think I should want it so soon. A rascal of a haberdasher, to whom I owe a considerable bill, taking it into his head that I am dying, has commenced a process against me, and will infallibly put my emaciated body into jail. Will you be so good as to accomodate me, and that by return of post, with ten pounds? O, James! did you know the pride of my heart, you would feel doubly for

me! Alas! I am not used to beg! The worst of it is, my health was coming about finely; you know, and my physician assured me, that melancholy and low spirits are half my disease: guess, then, my horrors since this business began. If I had it settled, I would be, I think, quite well in a manner. How shall I use the language to you, O do not disappoint me! but strong necessity's curst command.

I have been thinking over and over my brother's affairs, and I fear I must cut him up; but on this I will correspond at another time, particularly as I shall [require] your advice.

Forgive me for once more mentioning by return of post;—save me from the horrors of a jail!

My compliments to my friend James, and to all the rest. I do not know what I have written. The subject is so horrible, I dare not look it over again. Farewell. R. B.

[James Burness sent his cousin ten pounds the moment he received his letter, though he could ill spare the money, and concealed his kindness from the world, till, on reading the life and letters of the poet, he was constrained, in support of his own good name, to conceal it no longer. I was informed by my friend Dr. Burnes that his grandfather, now in his eighty-fourth year, was touched by the dubious way in which I had left the subject in the poet's life, and felt that he was liable to the imputation of coldness of heart. In a

matter of such delicacy I could not ask the family, and accordingly had left it as I found it, without comment or remark. The following letter, will make all as clear as day, and right my venerable friend in a matter respecting which he cannot be but anxious:

TO MR. BURNESS, MONTROSE.

"SIR,

"AT the desire of Mrs. Burns, I have to acquaint you with the melancholy and much regretted event of your friend's death. He expired on the morning of the 21st, about five o'clock. The situation of the unfortunate Mrs. Burns and her charming boys, your feeling heart can easily paint. It is, however, much to her consolation that a few of his friends, particularly Mr. John Syme, collector of the stamps, and Dr. William Maxwell, both gentlemen of the first respectability and connections, have stepped forward with their assistance and advice; and I think there can be no doubt but that a very handsome provision will be raised for the widow and family. The former of these gentlemen has wrote to most of the Edinburgh professors, with whom either he or Mr. Burns were acquainted, and to several other particular friends. You will easily excuse your not having sooner an answer to your very kind letter, with an acknowledgement of the contents, for, at the time it was received, Mr. Burns was totally unable either to write or dictate a letter, and Mrs. Burns wished to defer answering it till she saw what turn affairs took.

"I am, with much respect, your most obedient and very humble servant, "JOHN LEWARS".

"*Dumfries, 23rd July, 1796.*"

TO MRS. ROBERT BURNS, DUMFRIES

"MY DEAR COUSIN,

"IT was with much concern I received the melancholy news of the death of your husband. Little did I expect when I had the pleasure of seeing you and him, that a change so sudden would have happened.

"I sincerely sympathize with you in your affliction, and will be very ready to do any thing in my power to alleviate it.

"I am sensible that the education of his family was the object nearest to my cousin's heart, and I hope you will make it your study to follow up his wish by carefully attending to that object, so far as may be possible for you; or, if you think of parting with your son Robert, and will allow me to take charge of him, I will endeavour to discharge towards him the duty of a father, and educate him with my own sons.

"I am happy to hear that something is to be done for you and the family; but as that may take some time to carry it into effect, I beg you will accept of the inclosed five pounds to supply your present necessities.

"My friend mentioned to me that any little thing he had was in the hands of his brother Gilbert, and that the payment of it at present would be hard upon him; I have therefore to entreat that, so far as your circumstances will permit, you will use lenity in settling with him.

"I have farther to request that you will offer my best thanks to Mr. Lewars for his very friendly letter to me on this melancholy event, with my sincere wishes that such a warm heart as his may never want a friend.

"I shall be glad to hear of your welfare, and your

resolution in regard to your son, and I remain, dear cousin, your affectionate friend,

"JAMES BURNESS.

"*Montrose, 29th July*, 1796."

TO MR. BURNESS, MONTROSE.

"DEAR SIR,

"I WAS duly favoured with your letter of the 29th July. Your goodness is such as to render it wholly out of my power to make any suitable acknowledgement, or to express what I feel for so much kindness.

"With regard to my son Robert, I cannot as yet determine; the gentlemen here (particularly Dr. Maxwell and Mr. Syme, who have so much interested themselves for me and the family) do not wish that I should come to any resolution as to parting with any of them, and I own my own feelings rather incline me to keep them with me. I think they will be a comfort to me, and my most agreeable companions; but should any of them ever leave me, you, Sir, would be, of all others, the gentleman under whose charge I should wish to see any of them, and I am perfectly sensible of your very obliging offer.

"Since Mr. Lewars wrote you, I have got a young son, who, as well as myself, is doing well.

"What you mention about my brother, Mr. Gilbert Burns, is what accords with my own opinion, and every respect shall be paid to your advice. I am, dear Sir, with the greatest respect and regard, your very much obliged friend.

"JEAN BURNS."

"*Dumfries, 3rd August*, 1796."

ED.]

No. CCLXIII.

TO JAMES GRACIE, Esq.

Brow, Wednesday Morning, 16*th July*, 1796.

My dear Sir,

It would [be] doing high injustice to this place not to acknowledge that my rheumatisms have derived great benefits from it already; but, alas! my loss of appetite still continues. I shall not need your kind offer *this week*, and I return to town the beginning of next week it not being a tide week. I am detaining a man in a burning hurry. So, God bless you. R. B.

[The admirers of Burns owe this letter to the kindness of Mr. Finlayson, merchant in Kirkcudbright. James Gracie, to whom it is addressed, was at that time a banker in Dumfries: he wrote, on being told that Burns longed to be home, that he would, if he pleased, bring him back in a post-chaise—a kind and delicate way of expressing his regard. It was now felt by all it seems, but a few, that the poet was not only dying, but dying in the deepest poverty. Ed.]

CCLXIV.

TO JAMES ARMOUR,

MASON, MAUCHLINE.

Dumfries, 18th July, 1796.

MY DEAR SIR,

Do, for heaven's sake, send Mrs. Armour here immediately. My wife is hourly expecting to be put to bed. Good God! what a situation for her to be in, poor girl, without a friend! I returned from sea-bathing quarters to-day, and my medical friends would almost persuade me that I am better, but I think and feel that my strength is so gone that the disorder will prove fatal to me.

Your son-in-law, R. B.

[This is the last of all the compositions of the great poet of Scotland. The original was long preserved in the family of the Armours of Mauchline, and was given into the keeping of Captain James Glencairn Burns on his most urgent entreaty. It is now in India, and may he who so worthily holds it be as fortunate as he is kind-hearted. ED.]

No. CCLXV.

[The following letters were received too late to be placed in the proper order of composition: they are printed now for the first time, and with them the Poet's correspondence concludes. Ed.]

TO Mr. JOHN KENNEDY,

Mossgiel, 3rd March, 1786.

Sir,

I have done myself the pleasure of complying with your request in sending you my Cottager.—If you have a leisure minute I should be glad you would copy it, and return me either the original or the transcript, as I have not a copy of it by me, and I have a friend who wishes to see it.

Now Kennedy if foot or horse
E'er bring you in by Mauchline Corss,
L—d man there's lasses there wad force
A hermits fancy,
And down the gate in faith they're worse
And mair unchancy.

But as I'm sayin' please step to Dow's
And taste sic gear as Johnnie brews,
Till some bit callan bring me news
That you are there,
And if we dinna had a bouze
Ise ne'er drink mair.

It's no I like to sit an' swallow
Then like a swine to puke an' wallow,
But gie me just a true good fallow
Wi' right ingine,
And spunkie ance to make us mellow
And then we'll shine.

Now if ye're ane o' warl's folk,
Wha rate the wearer by the cloak
An' sklent on poverty their joke
Wi' bitter sneer,
Wi' you nae friendship I will troke
Nor cheap nor dear.

But if as I'm informed weel
Ye hate as ill's the vera de'il
The flinty heart that canna feel—
Come Sir, here's tae you
Hae there's my haun' I wiss you weel
And gude be wi' you.

[The person to whom this letter is addressed was then at Dumfries House: he interested himself in the success of the Kilmarnock edition of the poet's works, and obtained several subscribers. The Cotter's Saturday Night, enclosed in the letter, is now before me: it is written in a less vigorous hand than what his latter verses exhibit: there are some variations too; but none which affect the sentiment or feeling of that truly national poem. Ed.]

No. CCI XVI.

TO MR. AIKEN.

Mossgiel, 3rd April, 1786.

DEAR SIR,

I RECEIVED your kind letter with double pleasure, on account of the second flattering instance of Mrs. C.'s notice and approbation, I assure you I

"Turn out the brunt side o'my shin,"

as the famous Ramsay, of jingling memory, says, at such a patroness. Present her my most grateful acknowledgements in your very best manner of telling truth. I have inscribed the following stanza on the blank leaf of Miss More's Work:—

"Thou flattering mark of friendship kind,
Still may thy pages call to mind
The dear, the beauteous donor:
Though sweetly female every part
Yet such a head, and more the heart,
Does both the sexes honour.
She showed her taste refined and just
When she selected thee,
Yet deviating own I must,
For so approving me.
But kind still, I'll mind still
The giver in the gift;
I'll bless her and wiss her
A Friend above the Lift."

My proposals for publishing I am just going to

send to press. I expect to hear from you by the first opportunity.

I am ever, dear Sir, yours,
ROBT. BURNESS.

[This is the last time that the Poet spelt his name according to his forefathers: his poems were now in the press, and he had to make his election: there is no doubt however that he wrote his name Burns often before this period. Indeed the family aver, that in the Montrose archives the name is sometimes written Burnes, but this seems not to affect the pronunciation, which was always Burness till the Bard of Ayr deprived it of a syllable. The Miss More alluded to is Hannah More, whose life and works lately published, have recalled her name and merits to the attention of the world: R. Crawford, Esq. of Kilmarnock, obligingly pointed out this letter to the editor: it was first printed in the Kilmarnock Journal; of its genuineness there cannot be a shadow of doubt.—ED.]

No. CCLXVII.

TO MR. JOHN KENNEDY.

Mossgiel, 20th April, 1786

SIR,

By some neglect in Mr. Hamilton, I did not hear of your kind request for a subscription paper till this day. I will not attempt any acknowledgements for this, nor the manner in which I see your name in Mr. Hamilton's subscription list. Allow me only to say, Sir, I feel the weight of the debt.

I have here likewise inclosed a small piece, the very latest of my productions. I am a good deal pleased with some sentiments myself, as they are just the native querulous feelings of a heart, which, as the elegantly melting Gray says, 'melancholy has marked for her own."

Our race comes on a-pace, that much expected scene of revelry and mirth; but to me it brings no joy equal to that meeting with which your last flattered the expectation of Sir,

Your indebted humble Servant, R. B.

[The small piece, the very last of his productions which the poet enclosed, was the inimitable "Mountain Daisy." The name which heads it in this manuscript is "The Gowan," and I almost regret that any change took place. Ed.]

No. CCLXVIII

TO MR. JOHN KENNEDY.

Mossgiel, 17th May, 1786.

DEAR SIR,

I HAVE sent you the above hasty copy as I promised. In about three or four weeks I shall probably set the press a going. I am much hurried at present, otherwise your diligence, so very friendly in my Subscription, should have a more lengthened acknowledgment from

Dear Sir,
Your obliged Servant,
R. B.

[The Epistle to Rankine, enclosed in this hasty note, is well known. Burns seems to have been indefatigable in making his works known through the medium of friends the copies of his best poems in his own handwriting are numerous. His correspondents, living often at a distance from each other, were pleased with this mark of confidence, and read his poems to all who were willing to listen. ED.]

CCLXIX.

TO MR. JOHN KENNEDY.

Kilmarnock, August 1786.

MY DEAR SIR,

YOUR truly facetious epistle of the 3rd inst. gave me much entertainment. I was sorry I had not the pleasure of seeing you as I passed your way, but we shall bring up all our lee way on Wednesday, the 16th current, when I hope to have it in my power to call on you and take a kind, very probably a last adieu, before I go for Jamaica; and I expect orders to repair to Greenock every day.—I have at last made my public appearance, and am solemnly inaugurated into the numerous class.—Could I have got a carrier, you should have had a score of vouchers for my Authorship; but now you have them, let them speak for themselves.—

Farewell, dear Friend! may guid luck hit you
And 'mang her favorites admit you!
If e'er Detraction shore to smit you,
May nane believe him!
And ony de'il that thinks to get you,
Good Lord deceive him.

R. B.

No. CCLXX.

TO — ——.

Mossgiel, — 1786.

SIR,

Yours this moment I unseal
And faith I am gay and hearty!
To tell the truth an' shame the deil
I am as fu' as Bartie:
But foorsday sir, my promise leal
Expect me o' your party,
If on a beastie I can speel,
Or hurl in a cartie,

R. B.

[How fou Bartie was we must leave a Kyle man to tell: it seems a proverbial saying, and may be interpreted by a line of an old song—

"I'm no just fou but I'm gayley yet."

The original is preserved in the Paisley Library. The west of Scotland should be commended by all who write about Burns: his company was courted: his poetry was widely circulated: his memory revered, and every scrap of his writing treasured in his native district by high and low, rich and poor. ED.]

No. CCLXXI.

TO PROVOST MAXWELL,

OF LOCHMABEN.

Ellisland, 20th December, 1789.

DEAR PROVOST,

As my friend Mr. Graham goes for your good town to-morrow, I cannot resist the temptation to send you a few lines, and as I have nothing to say I have chosen this sheet of foolscap, and begun as you see at the top of the first page, because I have ever observed, that when once people have fairly set out they know not where to stop. Now that my first sentence is concluded, I have nothing to do but to pray heaven to help me on to another. Shall I write you on Politics or Religion, two master subjects for your sayers of nothing. Of the first I dare say by this time you are nearly surfeited: and for the last whatever they may talk of it, who make it a kind of company concern, I never could endure it beyond a soliloquy. I might write you on farming, on building, on marketing, but my poor distracted mind is so torn, so jaded,

so racked and bediveled with the task of the superlatively damned to make *one guinea do the business of three*, that I detest, abhor, and swoon at the very word business, though no less than four letters of my very short sirname are in it.

Well, to make the matter short, I shall betake myself to a subject ever fruitful of themes; a subject the turtle feast of the sons of Satan, and the delicious secret sugar plum of the babes of grace—a subject sparkling with all the jewels that wit can find in the mines of genius: and pregnant with all the stores of learning from Moses and Confucius to Franklin and Priestley—in short may it please your Lordship, I intend to write * * *

[*Here the Poet inserted a song which can only be sung at times when the Punch Bowl has done its duty and wild spirit is set free.*]

If at any time you expect a field-day in your town, a day when Dukes, Earls, and Knights pay their court to weavers, tailors and cobblers, I should like to know of it two or three days before hand. It is not that I care three skips of a cur dog for the politics, but I should like to see such an exhibition of human nature. If you meet with that worthy old veteran in religion and good fellowship, Mr. Jeffrey, or any of his amiable family, I beg you will give them my best compliments.

R. B.

[The original letter is in the possession of Mr. Henderson, of Langholm, and from the singular song which it contains cannot but be considered as a great curiosity. The Miller and Johnstone contest at that time agitated the Boroughs, and to this the poet alludes when he requests to receive notice of a field-day among the chief men of the district. The veteran in religion and good fellowship was the Reverend Andrew Jeffrey, Minister of Lochmaben, and father of the heroine of that exquisite song "The Blue-eyed Lass." For this information—and more than this—I am indebted to Hugh Jeffrey, the minister's son—a worthy person and skilful with the pen—yet one nevertheless

"Whom fortune uses hard and sharp." Ed.]

THE END OF VOL. VII.

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